



In the Rain

An Adrienne Fanzine



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We want to thank you all for participating in the first Adrienne Zine.



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Of Heroes and Guardians

by: Angylle

BETA: MOO

After Miracle Queen, Marinette is drowning in responsibility and guilt. Adrien gets some unexpected help to figure out his feelings.

Adrien was lucky.

In the past months, his father had become less strict. He was even allowing Adrien to have his friends at photoshoots with him. It was always a bittersweet experience to watch his friends laugh and play without him but it was also worth it, just for the few moments he *was* able to interact with them during breaks. His friends made photoshoots better. He knew it was a boring experience, but they didn't seem to mind. Everyone had made it to at least one shoot, except for Marinette.

The situation with Lila was always discomforting, though his friends' presence helped keep Lila's insinuations at bay, even if they were still oblivious to her lies. Her poses in photoshoots were still suggestive, but she always blamed their 'chemistry' and not her intentions. It didn't make it any less uncomfortable, but at least it only lasted while the camera pointed at them.

Kagami tried her best to help. Even though they had figured out relatively quickly that their relationship wouldn't work out, she was still a supportive presence. It made him wish he could force the sentiments, but the more time he spent with Kagami, the more he knew that he could not have the same feelings for her as he did for Ladybug. It had *pained* him every time he saw Ladybug. His heart ached knowing there were more obstacles between him and the heroine, and that it was he who had put them there.

In the end, Kagami ended their relationship after the second date, citing that they were better off as friends. It had been an uncomfortable transition, but in the end, she

had become a close confidant. Kagami had been right; they *were* the best emotional support for each other.

She had even coached him through the confusion that mounted when Marinette was around, though she wasn't around much lately. Marinette had changed. She'd become more reclusive and quiet, but he was finding she could talk to him now. Not the sputtering conversations they had when he thought she didn't like him, but actual *normal* conversations. It was like a wall had been torn down between them. He loved being able to communicate with her.

It had been a few weeks since Kagami helped him figure why there was fluttering in his stomach whenever Marinette was around and was probably growing tired of his complaints of sweaty palms and runaway hearts every time he saw the blue eyes or heard her voice. It had been weeks of hearing Ladybug's voice, only to think of Marinette. He didn't tell Kagami about *this* particular affliction, though.

She was probably regretting ever knowing him as he talked himself in circles but she was patient enough as he tried to decipher the best course of action around his newly defined emotions.

Marinette was beautiful; mind, body and soul, and Adrien wondered if he deserved her, or if she even liked him. Kagami threw a shoe at his head once, when he could not stop waxing poetic about Marinette's hand after they'd accidentally brushed together in the hall.

Whenever he argued that Marinette didn't show any inclinations towards him, Kagami proclaimed that their previous interactions were *proof* that Marinette was head over heels in love with him. He wasn't sure. The worst thing was that the more time he spent figuring out his feelings, the less he thought he'd be able to actually act on them.

What would he do if she *did* love him back?

He wondered at how Marinette could overshadow his lady in such a short time even when she wasn't even around.

Could she handle his baggage? Which not only included his dysfunctional family, but Chat Noir and Ladybug, and Hawk Moth.

Not to mention that he was still in love with Ladybug. He had half admitted and Kagami had half guessed it after they ended their romantic relationship, but she had laughed when he mentioned it as the same obstacle that had been between them. She seemed to think it wouldn't make a difference if he pursued Marinette, but would never explain her reasoning.

He hadn't told Kagami he was Chat Noir, of course, even though that was yet another obstacle between him and Marinette. He didn't think Marinette would appreciate *that* after Chat had rejected her advances.

Then there was the incident the week before to account for. Ladybug had been different since she became the guardian. More driven but also distracted. He hadn't thought it was his place to comment about it, but lately, he had noticed Ladybug was having trouble keeping her balance. It was like her attitude during Gamer's second akumatization had become her new personality. She seemed to be running on fumes and so he had offered to share the burden of the Miracle Box's guardianship with her.

He didn't regret the offer. Especially when the akumatized villains had become too dangerous and caused his death as Chat Noir more frequently than they used to. She always brought him back, of course, but he worried about the toll it was taking on her. And he wondered: was he willing to make Marinette suffer through his memory loss when he would have to renounce the guardianship? How much time would they lose? What treasured memories was he willing to sacrifice?

“Not to mention that he was still in love with Ladybug.”

Even with all his concerns, Adrien still spent countless hours drafting poems to the eyes that kept him awake at night. After winning her fifth fencing match in a row against him, Kagami had suggested he confess and ask Marinette on a date for Valentine's day. He had deflated then, feeling as brave as he had when they'd fought Reverser. Did he have the courage to do that? It wouldn't be his first confession to a girl, but confessing to Ladybug as Chat Noir seemed so different.

“Adrien.” The pinch on his arm got his attention where the call of his name failed. Adrien roused himself and glanced at an upset Lila, who was clinging to his arm. “Focus,” Lila hissed. “You can go play with them when we're done,” referring to Alya and Nino playing thumb wars on the side, not knowing that his mind was a few blocks away with the friend that hadn't been able to make it again.

“Less talking, more posing!” The photographer sing-song, and the slight wrinkle disappeared from Lila's brow as she followed the instructions. “Bellísimo! Cue the smoke!”

Adrien heard one of the assistants stumble before the whirr of a machine started. In seconds, the professional-grade smoke machine had filled the park of thick smoke, making it nearly impossible to see.

“Is this supposed to happen?” Adrien called as he coughed.

“Turn it off!” he heard the voice of the photographer splutter, but he couldn’t see him through the smoke. Adrien didn’t think he could see his hand in front of his face if he tried. It was ten minutes before they had the machine under control and thirty before the smoke cleared enough to see clearly. By then, his photographer was in a bad mood, the assistant was crying, and Lila had left.

The malfunctioning smoke machine was a miracle in disguise. It not only made Lila angry but cut the photo shoot short, and Adrien could not be happier because it would give him an opportunity to check on Marinette. Her absence from the photo-shoot made it unlikely that she would be around when they left the park to go to Nino’s house. He wasn’t upset that Nino and Alya had promised to get her to the photoshoot and failed. But he really wished she could make it to an outing at some point. Nino promised not to give up, pointing at his stubborn girlfriend as the key to manage it. Adrien yearned to have her near, only a few steps away.

So much for Miracles, but Adrien was still very lucky. He would walk by the patisserie when it was time for him to go home.



Marinette sat in a dirty alleyway, not caring what muck from the ground was already sticking to her workout clothes. The distressed superhero tried to keep her breathing low, her uncontrollable sobs quiet, but she knew she wasn’t managing. She didn’t know how far from her home she was, or how long she had been there after her transformation timed out. It could have hours for all she knew.

Everything that had plagued her since Master Fu’s departure bubbled in her thoughts. Chat’s deaths and revivals, the grimoire, Master Fu’s memory loss, and the guardian training.

A week after Master Fu’s departure, an encounter with a powered-up Mayura revealed that the tablet with the translated miracle book was in Hawk Moth’s possession. The guilt that had been festering in her had attacked with a passion after that. It never left her; it ate at her confidence and certainty in her ability to be a strong superhero. Day and night, chipping it away. After all, she had let her jealousy and heartache distract her from her duty as a superhero. She had allowed Hawk Moth to follow her and take Master Fu. It was *her* fault Master Fu no longer had his memory and she no longer had his support.

She had been lucky that Master Fu had thought to leave her a copy of the book in a memory drive, along with a letter to help guide her. It felt like she had read that

letter thousands of times since he left. But it wasn't the same thing as having him there. He had trained her as well as he could and she tried dearly to retain all the information, but she desperately needed guidance.

So that same week, she started using the horse miraculous to transport herself from Paris to the temple in Tibet to expand her training as the guardian. She went every night after midnight, returning to Paris in time to shower and change for school. She didn't think she'd gotten more than three hours of sleep per night since, but how was she expected to be a good guardian if she couldn't complete her training?

But the guardian training was only reinforcing how useless she really was compared to the other students there. It had been months, and she could still not read the book without the translation. She kept failing to properly create the power-ups for the kwamis, and all she heard from her instructors was how badly trained she was and how much work she had yet to do.

As Ladybug, Marinette had grown to think of herself as strong, confident, ready for whatever the world threw at her but the last few months had her doubting how strong she really was.

Her sobs echoed from the walls. Everything was wrong. Everything she has done on her was defective. She kept losing Chat Noir whenever they fought an akuma or a sentimonster or Mayura. Though Chat Noir still seemed to trust Ladybug and never blamed her, no matter the pain he endured before she could call up the miracle cure. Lately, It felt like he had more trust in her than she had in herself.

Marinette could tell she was losing control. Lila had promised to take everything from her, and she was. But maybe it was a good thing. The distance Lila had created between her and the others made her feel lonely, sure, but it helped with the constant attacks from Hawk Moth. She didn't have anyone to make excuses to. She didn't have any plans to cancel. She didn't have to explain her ever-growing dark circles, or her sleepless nights, or her near-constant state of exhaustion. Nino and Alya stuck around her, sure, but they treated her as if she was a thin blown glass bubble.

The knot constricting her throat cut off her breathing. She rubbed at her eyes, but she was dry. Empty. She almost wished she'd postponed her Sunday training with the guardians to be at the park. Even if it meant she had to watch Lila fawn over Adrien. She might have been exhausted, but a few hours with them was all she wished for.

She ended up having to remind herself that she had bigger responsibilities as she stared at her phone and Lila's social media's updates before turning off her phone and calling Kaalki's transformation phrase that morning.

What she wanted didn't matter.

"Marinette!" A hiccup died in her throat as she heard her name being called in *that* voice. It was Adrien. She didn't want Adrien to see her this way. But she didn't have much choice as he ran across the alleyway and crouched in front of her. She couldn't look at his face, but his fist curled and uncurled as if he didn't know what to do; as if he was Aspidochelone again, ready to fight the invisible akuma causing her affliction.

"What's wrong? What can I do?" Curse his stupidly kind heart. She would have preferred anyone but Adrien to find her.

"Why did she sound like a dying cat when she spoke?"

"Nothing," her voice cracked, and the word came out in a broken wail. "Nothing's wrong!" Why did she sound like a dying cat when she spoke? The sobs that had almost disappeared, intensified, choking her as the new wave of tears blinded her. She didn't see when Adrien knelt, she only felt his arms embracing her. She dug her face into his neck. Why was she feeling so weak? So insecure? So foolish?

Adrien murmured random things. Whatever he said, Marinette did not know. She only heard the reassuring tone of his voice, felt the soft caress of the simple pats on her back or his hands rubbing down her arm, as if warding off the cold.

She wished it was enough to forget her utter failure in the last few months. But how could she forget that she let everyone in Paris down every time she let one of them get akumatized? Every time she failed to get better in her guardian training. Every time Chat died during a fight.

She lost the battle against her tears and let go. Adrien caught her and crushed her to himself. Everything she had been keeping at bay flooded her stream consciousness. Memories, worries, Chat's offer.

After the fifth akumatization in a week, Chat had cornered her.

"LB, what's wrong?"

His words had disturbed her. It was a perfectly cordial sentence, but it wasn't her Chat; this Chat Noir was distant. No longer was she 'his lady', or 'buginette'. What did she expect? He had moved on. At first, Marinette hadn't been sure why knowing that

he had a girlfriend hurt. Until she realized she started to appreciate Chat's calm and unshakable belief in her when all the odds were against them. He never failed to trust her, and, without noticing it, she had started to see Chat Noir in a different light. She had let go of the illusion of Adrien and was ready to move on.

But heroes couldn't date.

"I'm fine! Everything's fine." She'd spat as she turned away from him, trying to make an escape from the usurper Chat Noir. "I need to go."

This Chat still sacrificed everything in the combat, fought to his last breath every time, and he did that still spouting stupid puns and catty replies. But the slight difference, the one that demonstrated his special feelings for her was gone. It made her feel far away from him and she couldn't handle the distance just then. She needed to leave.

“Adrien caught her and crushed her to himself.”

Before she could walk away, he'd grabbed her hand and yanked her to a stop. Ladybug hadn't fought back. She hadn't been sure she had the strength. With this battle piling on top of her already late night at the temple, she was exhausted.

And she still had homework to complete.

"You're not fine. You're paranoid, distracted, weak, and sleep-deprived." She had never heard his voice take such an unyielding tone, but she knew the statement was a fact. She was everything he had said, but the fact that he mentioned it without preamble, hurt. Had he ever been so direct before? She didn't think so. Then again, she had never let him down before.

"I am not any of those things. I'm fine." She had lied, even though she could see two of him through the headache.

"Are you? Can you even see straight right now? You missed the catch when I tossed my baton earlier. By a long shot."

"We need to go before our transformations run out."

"Your eyes are bloodshot and you're too pale." She'd known his words were not meant to sound accusatory or demeaning, but they stabbed at her insecurities that had festered since Master Fu's departure. The more she fought back against everything, the more she doubted she was the guardian Paris needed.

She'd shaken out of his grasp.

Remembering the loss of the warmth of his gloved hand on hers had a sensation of cold that crawling up her back. Adrien rubbed at Marinette's back like he sensed it but still didn't ask questions. He just offered her the comfort Ladybug hadn't accepted from Chat Noir.

"I can see just fine," Her missed step as she turned to leave contradicted her lie and she slid down the rooftop. Chat had barely caught her wrist and pulled her back up.

Every time she remembered that conversation, Marinette was disgusted by her attitude. She wondered when she'd started attacking the people that cared about her like a wounded animal. The more she thought about it the more it made sense that Chat would intervene.

Chat's tone softened even as he reprimanded her. "Of course you are. And you didn't slip and fall earlier, either."

How many mistakes had she made? That was another thing she hated: Ladybug was becoming as clumsy as Marinette.

"We need to go before our transformations drop." Ladybug yanked on her wrist again as her earrings announced the two remaining minutes but Chat hadn't let go.

"Maybe it'd be a good thing." His voice sounded like he was trying to calm the wounded animal that had just scratched his arm. "Let me help. If being the Guardian is so taxing, let me be Guardian with you!"

It was the most tempting offer she'd ever received. Chat Noir's help. His support. His earnest slitted green eyes said he was serious. Of course he was. She only considered it for a minute before the one-minute reminder of his ring and her earrings made her aware of her reality.

"I'll think about it." The words were empty. She had no intention of ever accepting. She was alone.

"That's all I can really ask for, I guess," There was the absence of warmth again as he let go of her wrist. It had been so hard to turn her back on him and swing from the rooftop.

But she had, and she'd kept swinging until she was sure no one could see her. She had de-transformed on her rooftop and broken into tears on her lounge chair. She woke the next morning, covered in a blanket that was not her own, still on the roof and having missed that day's training.

She'd thanked her mom for the blanket as she ran by the kitchen but before the door closed behind her, she heard her mother's joke: "It wasn't me, you sure Ladybug or Chat Noir didn't drop it off when they saw you out there?"

The question plagued her. *Could* it have been Chat? Her mother didn't go into her room to check on her during the night since she was little. Not unless there was an Akuma attack near the bakery.

Chat Noir. The most selfless, kindest person in the world. A hero willing to comfort a broken girl, even though he barely knew her. Who was always willing to lose his life, his memory and mind to help Paris... and her.

She'd seen Chat Noir the day after, in a non-deadly attack. He didn't say anything about his offer, but he had grabbed her hand and squeezed it instead of their customary fist bump. He'd started doing that every day, after every fight. His offer and support were there. After every offer, she became less resistant to consider it. In the calm moments and on the days when training was harder, or there was a test she didn't prepare enough for or she missed a deadline or a family dinner. Slowly, she became more receptive.

Paris needed the Ladybug Miraculous to be active and protect the people, but she had to be honest with herself: she could no longer juggle everything. The new training was draining, but she needed to continue being the guardian.

It was turning out to be a terrible choice to make.

Guardian or Ladybug.

If she continued being the guardian, she would need to choose another person to train with the Ladybug Miraculous and resign being Ladybug. She would have to reveal herself to Chat Noir. She knew she wasn't ordinary or talentless, but would she be what he expected her to be behind the mask? Then again, she didn't have any expectations for him. She already knew the core of his personality, and that was enough for her. Could it be the same for her?

But was relinquishing guardianship and losing her memories even an option? Would she force the same choices on Chat?

Could she truly share the training and responsibilities with another human being? She already shared so much with him. Maybe she could share the training and responsibilities with him too.

Maybe they were ready.

Marinette's crying had subsided, but she still sniffled into the soft white of Adrien's collar.

"Marinette?" Adrien's strained voice made her heartache and brought her back to the alley. At some point in her breakdown, Marinette had ended up curled up in Adrien's lap, his arms around her and her face in the crook of his neck. As soon as she noticed she tried to stand but he didn't let her go. Her face felt hot enough to be seen from space. "Are you okay?" His soft voice was so much like Chat Noir sometimes. She'd always known he shared the cat's compassion.

"I..." It was the only word she could say before noticing her raw throat and hoarse voice. She nodded, she didn't think she could say anything more right then without sounding like she had inhaled smoke for hours. He offered her a folded handkerchief.

She wiped at her face thinking about what kind of mess she would be. How long had she been in the alley before he found her? She had teleported back to Paris around six, right before the last light left the city, but the darkness around them made her think it had been hours since the sun had set.

“*It was turning out to be a terrible choice to make. Guardian or Ladybug.*”

"What was wrong?" He smoothed her hair back from her brow as he spoke, as if it were natural to sit in an alley with a hiccuping girl on your lap.

Lie after lie flashes before her. Some reasonable, others more absurd than the last.

But she was tired of lies.

"I," she cleared her throat. "I bit off more than I can chew and was overwhelmed by everything." The last straw had been miscalculating the portal that brought her back. It was supposed to have opened in her bedroom.

"Ah, I'd heard that happens to people." His words were teasing, but there was worry in his peridot eyes. "I, of course, wouldn't know... but..."

"Channelling Chloé?" She raised her eyebrow to accompany her own teasing. One good thing to come from the current mess shed made in her life was that she had gained another good friend in Adrien.

"Caught me." He smoothed back another strand of her hair. "Are you hungry? I still have another-" he looked at the screen of his phone and she glanced at it too. Twenty

past eight - she had set a new record for a self-pity fest, “-hour or two of freedom before I’m sealed away.”

She might have burned her Adrien calendar months ago, but Nino complained about Gabriel Agreste’s need to have Adrien home before nine enough for her to know that *that* was a lie.

“My treat,” Adrien winked when he noticed her indecision, “and I promise to tell your parents that I kidnapped you if you get in trouble for being out late.” Marinette was glad she had let herself move on from her starry-eyed worship of Adrien. It was so much easier to just enjoy his flirty side when it came out to play. His stomach growled, and she giggled as he said “besides! I’m hungry too!”

“Fine,” she laughed and tried clearing her throat again when the word sounded like nails on a chalkboard. “Only because your stomach threatened me, but if it growls at me again, I’m leaving.” It physically hurt to talk and laugh, but that was a good thing since it reminded her that she was alive and she had a mission to complete. She awkwardly stood from his embrace, before looking around the alley.

“What are you looking for?” Adrien asked as he scanned the ground, too.

It was the second time that night that she felt her cheeks heat up. This time in embarrassment over being such a child. “My bag and glasses, I may have thrown them when I started ... you know.” When she’d started to break down and neither Kaalki nor Tikki would stop talking and leave her alone.

Adrien nodded sagely and continued to search around with her. “Found them!” he exclaimed as he looked behind a huge bin. “I didn’t know you wore glasses!”

“I only wear them sometimes. I get tired of them.” She was back to half-truths. She would never be able to get away from the lies.

He wiped them clean on the hem of his under shirt before he placed them on her nose. “They’re cute.”

She laughed and walked around him. “C’mon you flirt, I was promised food.” She wasn’t fine, but maybe Adrien and Chat Noir could help her work everything out.

THE END



Angylle

Of Heroes and Guardians • Angylle

Colours of Your Heart

by: Alwaysinstoryland

BETA: Miraculous Elcie

In a world where people can only see colours in places their soulmate has been and in people their soulmate has interacted with, for Marinette, almost everything lacks vibrancy. Until one morning, when the school appears in colour for the first time ever.

Marinette's soulmate mustn't get out much. In a world where people could only see colours in places where their soulmate had been, and in people their soulmate had interacted with, for Marinette everything was awfully achromatic. The only indication that her soulmate was even *in* Paris were the tiny flickers of colour that occasionally showed up in nondescript places. She should be grateful for that, she supposed. Some people travelled all over the world to find the colours that led them to their soulmate. Others never got to see in colour.

At least she *could* see some colour, even if it was very dim and only in very few places. Though she had yet to meet anyone that appeared in colour, which made her wonder if her soulmate even had friends or family. Her soulmate, whoever they were, must lead a pretty lonely life if they didn't seem to go out or interact with many people. She hoped she could change that for them as soon as she could find them. *If* she could find them. Whenever she had the chance, she wandered all around the city trying to at least see where her soulmate might live, but so far to no avail. She didn't know how it was possible. The colours were supposed to appear brighter and more vibrant the more time their soulmate had spent at the place, but *everything* that had colour for her was only ever very faint, never enough to indicate that her soulmate might've been there more than once.

Adrien's soulmate seemed to love exploring the city. From his room, he could just see the little sparks of colour tracking winding paths all over the place. He'd spent many an hour sitting on the floor in front of his window, trying to make out where his soulmate had been the most. The few times that he'd been driven to other places for his activities, he'd sat with his face glued to the window of the car, despite Nathlie's objections, watching the blurs of colours of all the places his soulmate had been go past and hoping that one day he might get to visit those places too.

One little bakery on a corner glowed the brightest of all. It practically shone with brilliant colours. His soulmate must love that little bakery if they visited there so often to make it so vibrant. Perhaps they visited there every day to get some pastries. When he found his soulmate he was determined to visit there every day with them until that little bakery glowed as bright for them as it did for him.

But his father didn't want him to find his soulmate. At least, not for a while yet. Soulmates meant unnecessary emotions and drama, or so he'd said. And so, Adrien spent most of his days stuck in his own house. Nathalie was in charge of his schooling, and very few other people were allowed to come in for his various other activities. He was driven to any photoshoot that couldn't be done in the Agreste Mansion in order to avoid any unneeded interaction. "It's for your own good, Adrien." His father had told him the few times he'd tried to ask if he could go out.

With all that time spent alone, it was no wonder he dreamt about meeting his soulmate so often.

He was sad for them, that they didn't get to see the beautiful colours that he got to glimpse. They would only be able to see colour if they came here, but his father kept up high walls around the place, strategically painted a dull shade of grey so that even if they were viewed in colour it'd still seem like it wasn't. He could only hope that he'd be able to meet his soulmate someday soon and when he did, he was going to go everywhere he could so that his soulmate could see all the colours that he got to see.

It was happening. He was *finally* going to school. A *real* school with *real* people. Before his lessons for that day started, he managed to sneak out and promptly took

off. Chloe, the only friend he had been permitted to have, even if they had only ever been allowed to interact through screens (a caution they had to take since Chloe went to public school his father had said), had promised that she'd be waiting for him when he got there.

He'd tried to go the day before when school started but had gotten caught before he even got there. But that day he was *determined* to make it. He had been extra cautious sneaking out and now he was finally standing in front of the doors to the school.

The school glowed bright too. He had never been near enough to see how bright it was, despite living so close. His soulmate must go there.

The thought put a spring in his step and a grin on his face. He might meet his soulmate that day!



The first thing Marinette noticed when she got to school that day was that it was in colour. Very faintly, but she could just see the tiniest glimmer of colour in the buildings as she approached. Which meant that her soulmate was either there *right then* or had visited sometime between when she left yesterday afternoon and when she got there that morning. "What is it?" Alya asked from beside her when she stopped.

"It's in colour." She murmured and her friend shrieked gleefully.

"Oh girl, that's great!" she exclaimed, grabbing Marinette by the hand and starting to tug her along. "Come on, you might find your soulmate today."

Marinette followed, giggling, as Alya excitedly bounced along to class. But she was promptly distracted from her soulmate thoughts when she entered the classroom and spotted someone crouched by her desk sticking a piece of chewed-up gum on her seat.

"Hey! What are you doing?" She demanded, marching up to him.

"Oh, uh I-"

Chloe and Sabrina burst into giggles behind them and Marinette frowned. Of course. He was with them. "Okay, I get it. Good job you three, very funny."

"No, no, I was just trying to take this off." He tried to say.

"Oh, *really*?" More laughter came from Chloe as she bent down and covered the gum with a tissue. "You're friends with Chloe, right?"

“Why do people keep saying that?” He murmured to himself but offered her no real answer so she huffed and took her seat, ignoring the funny feeling in her chest she got when she looked at him.

“I know I’ve seen him somewhere before.” She said to Alya when she sat down and her friend passed her phone over, which was opened to images of several different magazines and Marinette suddenly remembered where she had seen him.

“Of course!” She gasped. “He’s the son of my fave fashion designer Gabriel Agreste!”

“Daddy’s boy, teen supermodel, *and* Chloe’s buddy? Ha, *forget it.*”

Marinette frowned down at her desk, then startled when she noticed that her hand was in colour. She held it up and examined it. When she had looked at herself in the mirror that morning she had been certain she hadn’t the slightest hint of colour to her. But now she most certainly did.

And the only new person she had interacted with that day was... *oh.*



This was not how Adrien imagined his first day at school would go. He didn’t even get a chance to explain himself properly before the girl dismissed him as one of Chloe’s friends and had started to ignore him. He’d only been trying to help.

Nino had said her name was Marinette. She smelled like fresh pastries. She must frequent the bakery a lot, just like his soulmate did.

... exactly like his soulmate did.

What rotten luck that just as he might’ve found his soulmate, he somehow managed to get on her bad side within minutes of meeting her.

Nino had encouraged him to talk to her, so that’s what he was going to do. As soon as he got the chance, he was going to explain to her that he hadn’t meant any harm with the gum and that he *had* been trying to remove it and hope they could at least become friends.



It was raining by the time school ended. Thankfully, Adrien had come prepared and had brought an umbrella with him. But it seemed Marinette wasn’t so lucky. He could see her waiting at the entrance for the rain to stop and he saw his chance. He approached her.

“Hey.” he said, but she wouldn’t even look at him. He stared out into the rain for a moment and took a deep breath. “I just wanted you to know that I was only trying to take the chewing gum off your seat, I swear. I’ve never been to school before. I’ve never had friends. It’s all sort of new to me.”

He finished his little speech and held his umbrella out to her as a sort of peace offering, hoping she would take it. Thunder rumbled in the background as she slowly reached out. Her fingers brushed his for the briefest moment as she took it from him and her eyes met his.

She had only held the umbrella for a second before it snapped closed over her, and he couldn’t help the surprised laugh that bubbled from him at the sight. She lifted it up with a little giggle that made his heart race. “I think you might be my soulmate.” He blurted out, without quite meaning to, and she froze, her eyes going wide.

“You- you think so?”

His brain caught up to his mouth then and he suddenly found himself floundering. “Um- I mean I’m pretty sure it’s you. I’ve seen the bakery.” He said. “Nino said your parents own it. I just thought my soulmate liked to visit, but the brightness would make more sense if you actually live there and well-”

“I think we’re soulmates too.” She cut him off.

A grin stretched over his face. “Yeah?”

“*“Hey.” he said, but she wouldn’t even look at him.*”

“Yeah.” She giggled. “Um... Would you- would you like to come back to the bakery with me? I’m sure my parents would love to meet you.” She peered past him at the car that was waiting. “Oh. Unless you have to go.”

“No!” He was quick to assure her. He *did* have to go, and he was probably going to get into trouble with his father later, but he couldn’t just pass up this opportunity. This was his *soulmate* standing here in front of him, smiling at him and inviting him back to the bakery he’d been waiting *so long* to be able to visit. This was his soulmate, and she was even better than he had ever imagined his soulmate to be, so wonderfully kind and amazing and now she was his *friend* as well and he couldn’t *wait* to get to know her better. “I’d love to come back to the bakery with you.” He breathed. “Just- just give me a moment.”

He dashed down to the car, ignoring the rain running down his back, and threw open the door. “Nathalie!” He cried. “Nathalie, please can I go to the bakery with Marinette, that’s Marinette up there, she asked me to go, please Nathalie, she’s my *soulmate*.”

The Gorilla peered over at him, seeming pleased, while Adrien waited with baited breath for Nathalie to reply. For just a second, her stern expression softened slightly, then she nodded stiffly. “Very well. I’ll reschedule your piano lesson. The car will be there to pick you up when it’s time to go.”

“Oh, *thank you* Nathalie!” Adrien threw his arms around her briefly, missing the small smile that flitted across her face, then whirled around and ran back up to Marinette, unable to keep the grin off his face. “I can go!” He announced, and she stepped over to share the umbrella with him, even though he had already been rained on.

The two of them huddled close under the umbrella, arms brushing as they walked. “You don’t leave your house much do you?” She asked him after a few moments of silence and he sighed.

“No, my father didn’t want me to go out or find my soulmate or anything.”

“But he let you go to *school*?”

He huffed out a little laugh and kicked at a puddle as they passed. Drops of water splashed up his leg. “No. He doesn’t know. I sorta snuck out.”

“Well, I’m glad you did.” She told him, glancing up at his face. He looked down and they shared a smile. “And as soon as this rain stops, I’ll take you to see all the best places around town seeing as you’ve not been out a lot.”

“I’d like that very much.” He said, and silently promised himself that he was going to find out all her favourite places and go there as much as possible so they could all shine bright with colours just for her.

THE END

Three Kids and a Hamster

by: Chatonne-Rousse

BETA: Stardust_Writer

During a sleepy late-night snuggle, Marinette and Adrien talk about their dreams for the future.

The same full moon that lit their way over rooftops and across the Seine an hour before shines through the hatch above the bed, illuminating their entwined legs in its gentle glow and casting shadows on the room below. Even if she weren't tucked beneath his arm with her cheek against his chest, this would be a place of perfect peace, awash in a sense of rightness and comfort and home. It makes his chest constrict all of a sudden, his next inhale a sharp shudder that rouses her immediately from near-sleep.

"You okay, *Chaton*?" she murmurs, eyes wide and worried.

He reassures her with a soft, genuine smile. "Yeah, I'm fine. Just... thinking."

Bending forward to press a kiss to her forehead, he pulls her back down to his chest and starts up a purr for her. The breathy giggle he gets in return is always worth the twinge of embarrassment and the weird tickle in his throat.

"About what?"

The purr dies down, replaced with a contented hum. "How much I love you, of course, Princess. What else?"

As expected, she swats him playfully and laughs, but a moment later he feels her hand stretch across his torso as she cuddles closer into his side.

"I mean it," she whispers into his shirt. "Your breathing got all weird. What's wrong?"

"Bugaboo, you know you take my breath away!"

"Adrien."

Her voice is all no-nonsense Ladybug, but it just makes him grin wider.

“I’m actually *not kitten*, Marinette.”

She groans and lifts her head again but when she meets his gaze after an exaggerated eye roll, her features soften in response to his. She begins to duck her head shyly before changing course and pressing her lips to his instead, soft and sweet and warm. His eyes slip shut and he melts beneath her, his ever-romantic heart singing her name over and over in a three-beat cadence.

“I love you, too,” she whispers against his lips, finally breaking away after a long, slow kiss that leaves them both breathless.

After a quick kiss at the corner of his mouth and another on his jaw, she settles back into the crook of his neck, her breath warm and tickly and perfect against his skin.

Logically, he knows he needs to transform and head home, but the stark difference between his bedroom prison and Marinette’s warmth is enough to keep him here just a little longer, stretching time and tempting fate.

Wouldn’t it be wonderful, he thinks, as the sleepy calm drifts over them once more, *to stay here forever, just like this?*

He imagines waking up this way, morning breath and snoring kwamis and a warm tangle of limbs illuminated by a new day’s dawnlight instead of the quiet moon. Perhaps there would be a purring cat asleep on the bed with them. And one day, maybe, he’d wake to find a toddler who had crawled up onto the bed and wriggled between them in the night to be close to maman and papa. *A family*. His heart squeezes with emotion again, but he keeps his breathing steady and Marinette doesn’t seem to notice this time.

Dreaming of what the future might hold seems like an extravagant luxury in a world where a supervillain regularly terrorizes Paris and threatens to rend the very fabric of the universe and its delicate balance. Then again, isn’t that all the more reason to dream?

Even with the freedom being Chat Noir grants him, the responsibility of avoiding that fate is a heavy weight across his shoulders, and a far more cumbersome yoke on his Lady’s. Imagining a day when they can transform for fun instead of necessity, cook dinner together, fall asleep just like this, and not have to wonder if an akuma alert will rouse them before the sun—well, that just makes him fight each battle harder and despise Hawkmoth that much more. After all, the fate of humanity includes the fate of Adrien Agreste and Marinette Dupain-Cheng, too.

Her fingers glide feather-light at his wrist, so he knows she's still awake, and before he can think twice about it, he's murmuring a question into the dark.

"Hey, Bug?" He takes a deep breath and lets it out slowly. "Do you ever think about... the future?"

Her hand stops its gentle, soothing motion against his arm, and he misses the feeling immediately.

"After we defeat Hawkmoth, or... ?" she trails off.

"That could happen tomorrow, so let's start with tomorrow and go from there."

"Her fingers glide feather-light at his wrist, so he knows she's still awake,"

She resumes her caress, though this time her hand trails higher, up and under his t-shirt sleeve to the warm skin of his bicep. He smiles against her hair and hugs his heat-seeking little bug tighter.

"Well, tomorrow we have a calculus test, then you have a piano lesson after school. I really didn't plan anything beyond that, but if we're going to squeeze in an epic final battle with Hawkmoth, I suppose I should work on my history project at lunch to get ahead."

"Cheeky bug!" He tickles her in retaliation, and she giggles into his chest. "I was being serious!"

"I know, *Minou*." She laughs for another moment but says nothing more.

He waits through one deep breath, then two, before he whispers her name, questioning, against her hair.

She cranes her neck to look up at him, her gaze shy but warm. "It's just... can I be weird?"

Ah, that explains her reticence. The delighted half-smile that crosses his face is pure Chat Noir, but he can't help it. He *loves* this.

"Of course, My Lady. Always."

Five months and four days ago (yes, he's counting—it was the greatest day of his life, so far), after more than three years of superhero partnership and civilian friendship, an unplanned reveal, and the awkward nine day aftermath (yes, he counted—it

was awful), they'd finally made it official. Adrien and Marinette had, at least. Ladynoir was still under wraps for now to avoid suspicion, but he looked forward to the day when a real kiss they could both remember would grace the front page of the Ladyblog.

At the beginning, between blissful kisses and timid touches, they'd taken the time to really get to know each other—with no secrets between them, a whole, beautiful picture emerged. It was amazing and thrilling and freeing. It was also a bit embarrassing.

She'd seen him in his Ladybug pajamas one evening when she'd stopped by his bedroom for an unplanned visit. Another afternoon, he'd opened a drawer in her room looking for a pen and discovered approximately two dozen photos of himself looking back at him. Plagg had unceremoniously dropped Adrien's Ladybug and Chat Noir action figures onto Marinette's lap while they watched a movie and proceeded to tell her that Adrien sometimes played with his dolls and made them kiss. He'd never been so mortified in his life (and he once fought an akuma wearing a banana costume, so that was saying something), especially when Marinette had laughed until she cried.

He'd have sentenced the tiny magical agent of chaos to eating Velveeta for a week if Marinette hadn't caught her breath, removed his hands from his beet-red face, and kissed him silly.

Afterward, lovestruck, he'd asked, "So I'm not... weird?"

Cheeks still stained with the sweetest blush, eyes soft and bright and full of love, she'd responded, "Of course you are, kitty. I already knew that," and kissed him again for good measure. "It's a good thing your Lady is just as weird."

And just like that, it was okay. His pajamas, her photo collection, his action figures, her calendar.

Can I be weird? preceded his admission of being unable to sleep if his Marinette lucky charm wasn't beneath his pillow. It was asked before he learned she slept with her handmade Chat Noir plushie beside her every night.

The question is rhetorical, of course. Permission to be weird is simply indemnity from embarrassment, a solemn vow of understanding between them. It's been the lead-in to many shared secrets and it still gives him a little thrill every time, just knowing that he's about to learn another closely-held tidbit about his Lady.

Tonight, he's especially curious—the question he asked was about the future, after all.

“I used to think about it a lot,” she begins quietly. “And I mean, a *lot*. I’m a planner, you know.”

Oh, he knows. Thank goodness one of them is.

“You’ve seen my sketchbook. You saw my wedding dress designs and all your possible matching tuxes. Alya’s dress and Nino’s suit... ”

“And they were beautiful, Bug. I loved them all.”

He can feel her smile against his t-shirt collar.

“Thank you, *Chaton*. But... it’s not just that. I, um... I chose the flowers for my bouquet, I planned the menu for the reception dinner—”

“And your parents will make the croquembouche,” he whispers, suddenly entranced.

She nods, but goes silent once more. He wants to hear about everything—the venue she imagined for the service and reception, what they’ll wear at the civil ceremony prior, whether their guests will throw rice or rose petals or wheat as they exit as newlyweds. It’s all so beautiful, his heart is positively singing; how could she ever think this is weird?

“I named our children.”

The song in his heart comes to an abrupt stop when the rhythm falters before restarting at hummingbird speed.

Dazed, he breathes, “Our... ”

“I know!” she groans. She covers her eyes with one hand and buries her face in his shirt. Her voice is muffled, but he’s hanging on every word. “I told you it was weird! I named them! I thought about who would be youngest, oldest, middle—”

“Three?” He chokes on air. Is he even breathing?

“I designed the little outfit we’d bring each of them home from the hospital in. Their nursery had a theme! Our hamster had a name! I imagined our house, our garden, the layout of the kitchen, the color of our master bathroom!”

“What color?” he asks weakly.

A pause.

“Blue.”

“I love blue.”

“I know.”

Silence descends again, as he attempts to regulate his breathing and bring his swirling, scattered thoughts under control. She hasn’t moved a muscle, and neither has he. Honestly, he’s thankful to be moored to his steadfast port in the storm right now, so he can’t float away or slip under.

“Adrien?”

He hums questioningly in response.

“I’m sorry.” Her voice is small and tinged with sadness, slicing directly through his current bubble of overwhelmed euphoria in an instant.

Sitting up so quickly that she’s dislodged from his side with a startled squeak, he pulls both of her hands between his and brings her close enough to really see her face in the shadowy moonlight.

“I designed the little outfit we’d bring each of them home from the hospital in.”

“Why are you sorry?” he asks, baffled. “That was...” he trails off, shaking his head as he searches for the correct word, wanting to convey his feelings properly. *Incredible* doesn’t seem like enough. *Perfect*, perhaps? *A dream I didn’t know I had until you said it, and now I want that exact thing more than I’ve ever wanted anything in my life?*

“Crazy, I know. Selfish.”

“What? No!” he exclaims, and her wide eyes snap to meet his. “Marinette, it sounds *amazing!*”

“Amazing?”

He lets go of her hands to gather her in a hug instead, happy to feel her arms wrap tightly around him in turn.

“Amazing,” he murmurs against her hair, hoping she can hear the sincerity in his voice. “Why do you think it’s selfish?”

“Because... because I never thought about what *you’d* want, not really. Maybe you don’t want kids—”

“I want kids,” he interrupts.

“Or maybe you don’t like hamsters.”

“Mari, I love hamsters.”

She smiles against his skin. “I’m glad. I thought you’d want a cat.”

“Oh, I do,” he says, nodding.

“I knew it!” she laughs. “But I didn’t know any of that back then. I just dreamed my own wild dreams and brought a fantasy of future you along for the ride. It wasn’t fair to you.” She leans back, settling her wrists over his shoulders and searching his gaze with her own. “You deserve to have a say in your own life, Adrien. For once.”

A wave of stunned gratitude wells up within him and he swallows around the sudden lump in his throat. No one, not even his beloved mother, has ever extended him the courtesy of autonomy, much less apologized for not considering it in the first place. The way Marinette loves him, with a selfless, gentle kindness, is like nothing he’s ever known, and it overwhelms him sometimes.

Oh, he loves her so much.

“Marinette,” he says, when he’s able to. “Do you want to live on a desert island with me and eat only fruit for the rest of our lives?”

She blinks, confused.

“Because that was one of *my* dreams,” he continues. “You—well, Ladybug—me, our hamster, and a ton of fruit. Silly, right?” He shrugs. “I was a lovesick teenager. I have a feeling you know something about that, don’t you, Bugaboo?” His cheeky wink and Chat Noir smirk are rewarded with the blush and giggle he’d hoped for. “My point is, I wasn’t thinking about what you wanted when I daydreamed about that, and I never worried about it. You have nothing to be sorry for, Bug.”

Her smile is bright even in the shadowy loft. “Thanks, *Minou*. Those were fun dreams.”

“Were? You don’t want the hamster and the blue bathroom anymore? I was just getting excited about our house and three kids.”

“What do *you* dream about?” She asks, clearly dodging the question with one of her own.

“*The way Marinette loves him, with a selfless, gentle kindness, is like nothing he’s ever known...*”

He doesn't even have to think on it to know the answer.

"A family. Hugs. Eating dinner at a little table together. Going to the beach and seeing you in your bikini."

She snorts. "Tomcat."

"I'm only human, Mari."

"Adrien, you can purr."

"Touché."

They can only laugh. Their lives really are ridiculous.

"Princess?" He asks after they've settled into silence again. "What are their names?"

"Who?"

"Our kids."

She takes a deep, deep breath, and it feels like an eternity before she speaks. "Emma, Louis, and Hugo."

"I love them already," he breathes, imagination awhirl with scenes of bedtime stories and blanket forts and the myriad other childhood joys he only knows about from movies and tv. It's so beautiful, *they're* so beautiful, that he has to clench his teeth for a moment to keep from crying. "Have you drawn them?"

She nods, brow starting to furrow in concern at what must be one hell of an expression on his face.

"And their clothes? The nursery? Our kitchen?"

"Yes, I told you I was—"

"You're *amazing*, Marinette. I can't wait to see them. I can't wait to meet them."

Before he knows it, she's pulled him into her embrace, whispering her love against his shoulder. If a few tears escape into her hair, she doesn't say a word. They stay like that for a few long, sweet moments, until a thought pops into his mind.

"Mari? Why didn't Plagg find *those* drawings when he found your sketchbook of wedding ideas?"

She pulls away from him and giggles. "Because that sketchbook is hidden under the mattress."

“Along with how many of my photos?”

The mock-glare she levels at him would be terrifying if she weren't so adorable. He leans in and watches her stern expression slacken just before their lips connect and his eyes close, and her soft sigh tells him he's forgiven once more for teasing her.

They fall back against the cat pillow and soft pink sheets once more, rearranging their bodies to that perfect fit that reminds him every time how phenomenally lucky he is to have found his soul's other half as a teenager via ancient magic and fated proximity. The kiss deepens, his hands clutch at her back, and he thrills at the feel of her fingers in his hair. This is everything, *everything*—love and light and power and freedom, the chance for a future, a home, a *family*.

It's just another late autumn Tuesday night in Paris. Marinette will convince him to stay for another hour, he'll set an alarm. They'll go to school again tomorrow and, though it's certainly possible they'll defeat Hawkmoth before the day is over, it's more likely they'll simply fight and cleanse another akuma before returning to the library to work on that history project.

But it's suddenly different. He's always fought for Paris, for the safety of his friends and family, for his beloved partner. Now? A new and different feeling of protectiveness rises in his chest, even as her tongue brushes the seam of his lips and his purr rumbles gently between their bodies.

Hawkmoth will rue the day he tried to take Emma, Louis, and Hugo away before Adrien could meet them. He makes the promise right here and now, with his Lady in his arms and their kwamis sleeping on the desk below: Every akuma from now until he can punch Hawkmoth in the face and rip the misused miraculous from him, Chat Noir will fight for Paris, the world, and that shining dream of the future. He's one half of an unstoppable team. Together, they can, and will, do anything.

He and Marinette have three kids and a hamster to look forward to, after all. And it's going to be *amazing*.

THE END



Nightly Proposal · Rose Manley



Interlude · GgC/AnimeDeviant

Familiar Faces

by: Djaeka

Adrien can't quite shake the feeling that he's met Marinette before, even though this is his first time in public school. She can't quite lose that habit of being more comfortable with him than she should be, given his long-standing friendship with Chloe. When it comes right down to it, the puzzle isn't all that hard to put together.

"Your heart is not *actually* going to burst out of your chest," Adrien muttered under his breath. "Nino said that's not actually a thing, even when the girl you're apologizing to is *super super mad* for something you didn't do."

Breathing unevenly, Adrien stepped forward.

"It's *not*, he promised."

He'd deliberately waited until after school so the rest of the student body didn't have to watch him botch his apology to Marinette, but the idea that she could probably murder him with a couple of well-placed words and no one would witness it was starting to make him second guess the decision.

Marinette stood at the front of the school, staring out at the drizzle of rain that had started. She lifted her hand to catch the raindrops falling from the roof, sighing before settling her bag on the pavement next to her. Adrien's eyebrows pinched together.

I guess she doesn't have an umbrella? Maybe she's waiting out the storm.

“Hey.” Adrien waved, hoping the hint of a smile on his face would soften her formidable gaze.

Judging from the look he caught just as she turned her head, his smile did absolutely nothing to keep Marinette from glaring holes through his face. He swallowed, and wondered if she’d let him apologize before she killed him. With another steady breath, Adrien opened his umbrella.

“*He swallowed, and wondered if she’d let him apologize before she killed him.*”

“I just wanted you to know that I was only trying to take the gum off your seat, I swear.” Adrien’s words felt rushed, running out of breath toward the end of the sentence. Years of being told to maintain eye contact when he spoke were the only saving grace that kept him from feeling like a complete idiot.

His heart doubled down on its attempt to squeeze out from under his ribs. Marinette had been more outspoken yesterday morning than he’d ever been allowed to be in his life. Even though she was nowhere near as sharp as Chloé typically managed, she made him feel like her judgement hung over his head, an axe ready to swing if he made a single mis-step.

It would be *really* nice to clear the air.

“I’ve never been to school before. I’ve never had friends. It’s all sort of new to me.”

Marinette’s eyes shot up to actually meet his, eyebrows disappearing into her hair-line by the time he finished speaking. One eyebrow dropped back down and Adrien shifted from foot to foot as she studied his face intently. He forced himself to maintain eye contact.

She spoke hesitantly at first, frowning. “Okay. Thank you for your honesty then.”

Adrien beamed, the knot in his stomach beginning to unravel. Teeth tingling from the quick adrenaline burst that flooded his system, he stretched the arm holding the umbrella out toward Marinette in an attempt at a peace offering.

Her eyes widened and went from a pale pink to blushy rose before he realized he’d probably made a mistake. Adrien’s own eyes widened in panic.

She’s probably super embarrassed, like I’m calling her out on not having an umbrella. Stupid!

His fingers tightened around the handle and his thoughts momentarily distracted him from both the rain and the girl in front of him until she extended her hand to accept the umbrella. Their fingers brushed as he handed the umbrella to Marinette, and Adrien's knuckles tingled at the contact.

Clearing his throat, Adrien began to open his mouth to say something else. He stopped short when he heard a quiet snap followed by the umbrella slamming shut over Marinette's head. He stopped breathing and his jaw dropped.

She was gonna be so mad, but the sight of his umbrella standing in front of him wearing pink jeans was so ridiculous. A gasp turned into breathless laughs, forcing him to double over clutching at his stomach and giggling hysterically.

Right when Adrien thought he had his laughing fit under control, Marinette giggled along with him. Her face was still a faint shade of pink, but Adrien felt relief travel down his spine as her laughter became more genuine and less nervous.

Marinette shoved her palm against the frame of the umbrella, forcing the fabric back open with a determined moue.

Adrien tilted his head to the side, feeling like the look was oddly familiar.

"Yesterday was the first time we've met, right?"

Marinette's eyes narrowed. Her mouth pulled into a tight line, and Adrien felt his own mirror it. She chewed on the inside of her cheek before responding.

"Yeah. I would definitely remember having met you before. Why?"

"You just seem really familiar to me. Like I've met you before but I can't quite place when."

Marinette rolled her shoulders back, dropping her chin to her chest and breaking eye contact with him. She made a low humming noise and Adrien wondered if she was going to ignore the comment. Raising her head back up, Marinette met his eyes again.

"I've actually been trying to figure that out for a minute or two. Maybe we've met before, if you've been to my parents' bakery down the road."

Adrien allowed his head to tilt back, catching a couple of raindrops on his face as he did. "You know what, I probably have. My mother used to take me to bakeries for some of our outings when I was little."

He chuckled, happy to be rid of the twitchy bit of déjà vu that tickled the back of his mind. His eyebrows raised as he backtracked.

“Wait, which bakery?”

“Tom and Sabine’s.” Marinette pointed across the street, and Adrien twisted his upper body to peer through the rain at the little brick building that housed his favorite bakery for macarons. He spun back toward Marinette, a wide grin plastered on his face.

“I love that bakery! Maybe I’ll see you more often.”

Marinette’s lips pursed together and she snorted at his enthusiasm. “Maybe. For now, I’ll see you tomorrow?”

“Yeah. Tomorrow.” Adrien turned to walk down the steps and paused. “Hey Marinette?”

“Yes?”

“Does this mean we’re friends now?”

Marinette took a deep breath, letting it out in a gust of air. “I think maybe you’ll need to work up to that. How about a truce and I’ll see if I believe you about the gum?”

Adrien nodded, his soft smile more of a grimace. “Deal. See you tomorrow, Marinette.”



“Marinette!”

At the sound of Adrien’s voice, Marinette jolted violently and flung her pencil halfway across the room. Frustration bent her mouth into a frown. Running her fingers over the sketch she’d been working on, she checked for any dark-lined mistakes.

Marinette blew out a relieved sigh when she couldn’t find any indication that her panic ruined her work. She lifted her face to see the smile on Adrien’s face, wide despite the way his eyebrows pinched and his hands wrung the strap of his bag. She stood to grab her pencil before turning back to him.

“Good morning Adrien,” she sighed. “How was your evening?”

His face lit up, the smile extending to reach his eyes. “Good! How was yours? Did you get home okay?”

“I did, thank you.” Marinette dropped back into her seat, eyeing his face for any sign of another potential Chloé trick. She returned her pencil to the page in her sketchbook, lightly blocking in the face of the figure.

Adrien moved closer to her, craning his neck over her shoulder from the desk behind. Marinette ignored him, finishing the pose before addressing him again.

“Do you need something?”

“Not particularly.” Adrien’s eyes didn’t move from the paper while responding. “My father doesn’t let people in the room when he’s designing and it makes me curious about how the process works.”

“*She lifted her face to see the smile on Adrien’s face, wide despite the way his eyebrows pinched*”

He blinked, straightening and glancing around the empty room. Scrubbing at the back of his neck, Adrien took a step backwards. Marinette raised one eyebrow.

“What?”

“Nothing, I um. I just realized that you might not *like* someone watching you and I—“ He swallowed thickly, avoiding her gaze. “I probably should have asked.”

Marinette snorted, dropping her attention to the drawing once more. “It’s fine, I don’t mind. ”

Adrien stepped closer, feet shuffling against the tile. He watched her shade the line of the dress shirt with a tilt to his head.

“Can I sit next to you and watch?” Marinette rolled her eyes at the soft murmur, scooting herself over into Alya’s seat and allowing Adrien to take her own. He slid into the chair quietly and stopped fidgeting. Allowing herself to focus on her work, Marinette began detailing the lines of a pantsuit she hoped she could wear one day.

She was unsure of the color she wanted to use on the suit for the moment, allowing grayscale to define the folds and dips instead. Tilting her head, she placed delicate little polka dots along the undershirt, a subtle homage to the little kwami residing in her bag.

Adrien made small humming noises as he observed, his chin propped up in one palm and a beatific smile refusing to leave his face. As she began to shade tiny loops to indicate lace along the sides of the pants, Marinette spoke again.

”Why are you smiling at me like that? It’s not that impressive.”

Adrien cleared his throat. “It’s impressive to *me*, I can’t draw. But also, it’s just really nice to watch someone make something.”

He coughed.

”Also I’m trying not to make you angry again and I figured if I shut up and smile I have a better shot at that.”

Marinette rolled her lips together to stave off a giggle. She doodled a flower on the bottom hem of the pants, bringing the shape of the vines up the leg to mimic the one she’d stitched on her favorite shirt. She wrinkled her nose and shaded the area, changing her mind about so many design elements. She noted color ideas to the side for later and flipped the page.

”I told you I would give you a second chance, and I’m doing that. I’m not a jerk and I’m not going to get mad at you for talking.”

“*Marinette rolled her lips together to stave off a giggle.*”

Adrien opened his mouth to reply, stopping short when the door to the classroom slammed open as Alya announced her presence. She grabbed at the door to keep it from crashing against the wall a second time, leaving it open as she made a beeline for her desk.

Her eyebrows furrowed as she took in the scene before her.

Alya set a hand on the table, towering over the pair and glaring at Adrien while she addressed Marinette. “Hey girl, you okay?”

Marinette slipped her sketchbook into her backpack and carefully stored her drawing pencil nearby while addressing Alya’s question.

“I’m fine, Alya. Adrien was just watching me draw before class.”

Alya’s eyes narrowed further, still not turning to Marinette. ”And you’re not still mad at him?”

Shaking her head, Marinette leaned back on the chair and stretched her arms above her head.

“He apologized yesterday. He’s on probation.”

Adrien’s smile grew thinner, a polite curve still firmly in place on his lips. He gathered his bag and dropped it on the desk in front of Marinette’s. He settled himself into

the seat as Alya used her hips to slide a giggling Marinette back into the space she'd been occupying when he arrived.

Marinette pulled her class notebook out of her bag, and fell over when Alya grabbed her shoulder to yank her close enough to whisper.

"Are you actually okay, Marinette? Say the word and I'll rip him a new one."

Marinette pursed her lips. "I'm fine, Alya, promise. He apologized, gave me his umbrella when it was raining yesterday, and we have a truce."

"A truce, huh? Not friends?"

Marinette snuck a look toward the back of Adrien's blond head. She sighed a little, trying to keep her breath quiet and even so he wouldn't hear.

"Not yet. He's still *Chloé's* friend, you know? I'm not sure if I can trust him."

Alya nodded, giving her shoulder a pat and releasing Marinette from the death grip. She grabbed her own supplies for class, positioning her phone off to the corner of the desk so she could still see the screen over her book.

"So!" Marinette jumped again, cursing under her breath at how easily startled she was. She glared over at Alya, who hadn't even noticed.

Alya tapped on her phone, bringing up video of Stoneheart at the Eiffel. Marinette held her breath.

"I've spent all night analyzing the footage from the battle, and Ladybug's mannerisms of course, and I have a general profile for who it might be under the mask." Flipping open the notebook in front of her, Alya drew her finger down a list of names.

Marinette's heart stopped, and she forced herself to breathe so she could respond to Alya. Leaning forward, she glanced down the list.

I didn't think she was this serious about the identity thing.

"Don't you think this is a little invasive, Alya? You can't put these people's names on your blog."

Alya made a dismissive noise, waving a hand in front of her face. "Of course I'm not putting the list on my blog. I'll figure out who Ladybug is first, *then* I'll post it."

Adrien turned partially around, listening in. Marinette shot him a look, eye twitching. He just smiled back and turned to address Alya.

"Anyone in particular you have your eye on?"

"Actually, yeah!" Alya began pointing at names, detailing what made some of them better candidates than others. Marinette groaned, leaning her head back on the seat.

"Alya, she's entitled to her privacy. She just saved Paris, can't you cut her some slack?"

"But we have a right to know! And we can support her if we know who she is."

Marinette gritted her teeth, loosening her jaw enough to hopefully seem uninvested. "Alya, Hawkmoth would *definitely* go after her family and friends if you do that."

"He's not going to be reading *my blog*, Marinette."

"He might."

Both girls turned to watch Adrien rub his chin, looking at the floor. "I mean, if I were a supervillain and there was a blog that was trying to out the identity of my nemesis, *I* would definitely be keeping tabs on that. Even if they were wrong a few times, it only takes one good guess."

Alya began to argue, but closed her mouth when Adrien sighed dreamily and muttered to himself. "Pretty sure she's too amazing to let her identity slip just like that, though."

A wide smirk worked its way onto Alya's face and she leaned over the desk toward Adrien. He leaned back, eyes widening and a moment of panic crossing his features.

"Sounds like somebody has a crush on our new superhero." Alya drawled, lifting her phone toward Adrien's face.

Marinette placed her hand on Alya's phone, forcing her to set it back down on the desk. She covered her mouth with her free hand to stifle the urge to laugh at Alya's pout.

Turning back to Adrien, she smiled as he lifted one hand to scratch at the back of his neck. He stared at the back of his seat.

"I mean, sort of. Who wouldn't with the way that she called Hawkmoth out the way she did? It was *amazing* standing at the base of the tower and watching her take him on. She verbally *annihilated* him."

His hand dropped to his lap and Adrien smiled again before lifting his eyes to meet Marinette's and Alya's in turn.

"*She's* amazing."

Marinette blinked, shoulders relaxing at the awe in his voice, the admiration. It felt *good* being appreciated like that.

“You were at the base of the tower? I didn’t see you in the video! How close were you?” Alya’s voice broke Marinette out of basking in the compliments and her eyebrows drew together.

I didn’t see him there either. She shook her head, blinking several times to dismiss the thought. *Though I was pretty distracted, I probably just missed him.*

“ *It felt good being appreciated like that.* ”

“Oh, I was kind of toward the back. I didn’t want my father to see me on TV and ground me.”

”Makes sense.”

A shrill voice announced the arrival of Chloé, and Marinette straightened her spine to endure the usual glares. Luckily, Chloé chose not to confront her again, glancing uneasily at the seat Ivan usually occupied, and took her seat as Madame Bustier arrived with the rest of the class close behind.



Adrien dropped into the seat next to Marinette, taking a long sip from his coffee cup before sliding Marinette’s double-shot gingerly toward her. She hadn’t lifted her head yet, so he made sure it was far enough away that if she knocked it over again it wouldn’t spill on her sketchbook.

Mumbling a thanks, Marinette reached for the cup without looking up. Adrien kept two fingers on the top of the cup to steady it until she blindly wrapped her hand around it.

Marinette finally set her pencil down with a deep sigh, taking a drink and stretching her neck from side to side. Adrien leaned forward over the desk and slid his bag onto the floor next to him.

“What are you working on today? Is it the same gown from yesterday afternoon?”

“No, I stayed up late to finish that one.” She poked Adrien in the nose when he leveled an annoyed look in her direction. “Yeah, I know I promised I’d stop doing that. Working on it.”

She ducked under the table, resurfacing with a small pastry bag. Adrien’s face lit up and he snatched it out of her hand while Marinette laughed. He shoved a croissant in his mouth, chewing while she flipped a couple pages back.

“Okay, so give me your thoughts on this one, I modified the cuff a little bit but I’m still not sure if there’s too much going on with the pattern near the hem.”

Marinette sat back, sliding the book toward him before grabbing a croissant of her own. Adrien brushed crumbs from his fingertips and leaned forward over the sketchbook, using the cover to move it closer.

He studied the sketch she’d asked about, a semi-formal suit jacket with a subtle floral pattern near the cuffs and lapels. He puffed his cheeks out as he considered it.

“It’s not *bad*—“

“But something’s not right.”

“Exactly.”

Adrien tilted his head to the side while sipping at his coffee again. “What color were you planning on making the embroidered floral design?”

“*Marinette sat back, sliding the book toward him before grabbing a croissant of her own.*”

“If the jacket is a dark blue, I was thinking of something to contrast. Maybe a lighter color, usually you only go with a darker color if you want to make it look lacy and delicate and that’s definitely not the goal for men’s jackets.”

“Why floral to begin with? It’s pretty uncommon for menswear.” He sat back, eyes locked on the sketchbook and eyebrows drawn together.

Marinette sighed, popping the last of her croissant in her mouth. “*Because* it’s uncommon for menswear. I wanted to make something that would stand out. Seems kind of dumb now though.”

“I don’t think it’s dumb. Just unusual.” Adrien rolled his shoulders back. “Okay, so what if you did it in the same color but shinier? Like you’d use for a waistcoat or a pocket square?”

Marinette’s eyes shot up to meet his. Adrien rubbed the back of his neck.

“Is that stupid? I just figured if it’s the same color it won’t be too ‘feminine’, but it would still stand out.”

Marinette snatched her sketchbook back, scribbling frantically in the margins. Once she'd gotten the idea on paper, she dropped the pencil and launched herself at him, hugging tightly.

"Adrien, it's *perfect*, thank you!"

Adrien's arms wrapped around her waist and he smiled into the side of her head. His chest felt warm and tight when she let go, babbling about other design ideas she'd been working on.

He suppressed a grin when he heard Alya down the hallway yelling for Marinette. Snickering while she put her sketchbook away, Adrien leaned back to wait for the details from the latest akuma that Alya had managed to pick up.

"Marinette!"

"Hello Alya." Marinette grabbed her coffee, downing a gulp of it and waving her free hand. "Go ahead."

Adrien smiled as Alya sat directly on the desk in the next row down, launching into her interpretation of the akuma and its abilities. The smile drooped when Alya leaned forward and praised the way that Ladybug used her lucky charm to end the fight.

Adrien's stomach felt hollow, and he set the coffee down before the combination gave him a stomachache. He was used to people seeing Ladybug as the hero, but it didn't stop the sting from being ignored.

"Actually, Chat figured that one out."

Adrien and Alya twisted to stare at Marinette, sipping her coffee with raised brows. Alya frowned, pulling the footage back up.

"No, Ladybug—"

"Did the actual work, but Chat figured it out and told her how."

Alya looked up from her phone and Adrien's eyes narrowed as he stared at Marinette.

"How do you know that?"

Marinette's eyes went wide and she choked on her coffee, spluttering and coughing. Adrien patted her back gently, waiting for her to be able to breathe again. She waved at Alya to give her the phone.

When Alya handed the device over, she scanned through the footage on high speed. She coughed a few more times before handing it back over and pointing at the screen.

“See how they’re crouching over there talking?” Marinette croaked her words and Adrien winced in sympathy. “Ladybug looks really confused and smushes her hand over her face for a minute before Chat Noir says something. Right after that, she jumps up and doesn’t have any trouble. Chat solved that one, not Ladybug.”

“Huh.” Alya tapped on the screen, rewatching the scene. “I’ll have to update my write-up.”

Marinette grabbed her cup again, sipping more cautiously. Adrien watched her, chest warming more than it had from the earlier hug. A small smile turned the corners of his mouth.

“Kind of a fan, Marinette?”

Marinette spluttered again, but managed not to suck any coffee down the wrong pipe this time. Wide eyes met Adrien’s and he briefly wondered why she looked so panicked.

A garbled sentence filled with denial left her mouth and Adrien’s smile morphed into a teasing smirk.

Leaning forward, he let his voice pick up a tone of suspicion. “Are you lying, Marinette?”

Her face went bright red and Adrien couldn’t hold his laughter in any longer, collapsing on the table in front of him in hysterics. Marinette placed her hand on his shoulder and shoved him lightly, grumbling something about being mocked under her breath.

“Nothing to be ashamed of, Marinette. If you’ll recall, I have a crush on Ladybug.” He plopped his face onto the palm of his hand, smiling up from his place laying on the table.

“Yeah, yeah, fine. *Maybe* I’m a bit of a fan. I don’t have a crush on Chat Noir though!”

Adrien moved his hand to cover his mouth so she wouldn’t see the grin. “Never said you did.”

“Good. Because I don’t.”

He snorted, earning a glare. “I’m always game to talk about our resident superheroes if you want though. You obviously catch things I don’t in the videos.”

Marinette smiled smugly down at him, taking another sip of her coffee.

“Yeah, okay. Sounds nice.”



“You are *never* going to guess what Chat Noir did!” Marinette’s livid screech echoed through the hall as she hauled her locker open. Adrien’s eyes slammed shut and his face crumpled at both the sound of metal screeching and how *painfully angry* she was at him.

Thank everything she didn’t know she was angry at *him*.

“Oh?” He cleared his voice, trying to get it to do anything but croak.

Marinette’s answer was a growl, and Adrien instinctively raised his hands as he took a step back. He usually appreciated how much of a fan she was, but she took it *very* seriously when he took a hit for Ladybug and sometimes she was outright terrifying.

“He took *another* hit for Ladybug!”

Adrien leaned on the locker next to her, trying to remember how nonchalant looked and hoping that Marinette might too angry to notice how stiff his neck had gone. “How is that different from any other fight? He usually takes the hits.”

“Yeah but I’m pretty sure I heard something crunch this time and that *absolute idiot* is going to get himself killed one day.” Marinette gathered her books for class, slamming her locker shut just as violently as she’d opened it.

Adrien winced, remembering the crack he’d felt in his shoulder when he hit the facade of a building during the fight and the way his vision had gone dark for a few seconds. Mindlessly rubbing his shoulder before catching the motion, he held a hand out for Marinette’s books.

She waved him off before returning to her irate ranting, leaving Adrien to fidget with the strap of his bag. He frowned.

“*I’m always game to talk about our resident superheroes if you want...*”

“Hey, how did you know Chat Noir got hurt?”

Marinette froze mid-sentence and Adrien swore she stopped breathing. She sucked in a rapid breath and forced her words out just as quickly.

“Alya! She was there recording and I saw the video!”

His brows furrowed deeper and Adrien shrugged his shoulders back to loosen the muscles. “Yeah, but she hasn’t uploaded it yet. She always says that she wants to drop them around the time people get home from work for the most views.”

Marinette waved a hand past her face. “Adrien, she’s my best friend.”

He stuck his lip out. Marinette poked him in the nose, chuckling.

“Put that lip away, Alya was here first.”

“By like a day!”

“His brows furrowed deeper and
Adrien shrugged...”

“Still counts. Anyway, I get first peek at videos.”
Turning with a shrug, Marinette began walking toward their classroom without waiting for Adrien to follow.

Adrien studied the back of Marinette’s head as she led the way down the hall.

If she’s back before Alya, how did she see the video?

He shook his head to clear it. The connection was tenuous at best, she was right that being friends with Alya gave them early footage rights regularly.

She wasn’t Ladybug, no matter how much he wished sometimes.

She’s just Marinette.

“Coming, Adrien?”

He nodded, following her to class and forcing thoughts of Ladybug’s identity out of his mind.

She couldn’t push Chat Noir’s identity out of her mind.

Adrien’s gentle encouragements when they worked on designs or projects together were too much like Chat’s nudges when she struggled with a particularly draining akuma.

Chat's willingness to put himself in danger in battle was too reminiscent of Adrien telling Chloé to stop picking on Marinette for liking videogames by outing his own interests.

Their reactions to gentle touches and gifts of food were so alike that during their last gaming session she'd accidentally slipped and almost called Adrien "Chat" before she managed to course correct.

There were too many times during a conversation about the heroes that Adrien mentioned something she couldn't pinpoint in one of Alya's videos.

It couldn't just be a coincidence.

"Marinette? Your mom let me up! Can I come in?" Adrien's voice drifted through the trapdoor and Marinette scrambled to let him in.

"Hey! Right on time. I have the project supplies if you have the book we're working on."

Adrien climbed through the trapdoor, balancing a tray of treats from Sabine in one hand and carrying his bag in the other. Marinette snagged the tray, settling it on the desk while he closed the trapdoor.

Marinette dropped a stack of papers on the floor and started to sort through them to look for the notes she'd taken in class. Adrien grabbed the literature book he'd checked out, flipping quickly to the page they needed.

He pressed the spine flat, sliding the book toward her on the floor. "Okay, so I took a bunch of notes on the chapter we're covering, but I wanted to see where you'd like to start."

Surfacing with the paper she'd been looking for, Marinette shoved the other sheets aside haphazardly and started scanning the page. With a victorious little shout, she pointed at the section detailing the assignment.

"Okay, so here's our guidelines, do you think you can work on this section while I outline the beginning and end? That way we can meet in the middle and smooth it out in editing."

Adrien nodded, getting to work on the portion she requested. Marinette watched him read for a moment, distracted by the way his tongue poked out in concentration. Shaking herself to focus, she zeroed in on the assignment.

Several hours later, stuffed with pastries and satisfied with the result of the paper they'd produced, Marinette walked Adrien to the door to her room.

"Do you want me to walk you out?"

Adrien grinned, shaking his head. "No need, I think I can find my way. Thank you though."

Marinette raised her hand to wave at him, startled when he managed to grab it in his own. Adrien leaned over it and pressed a kiss to the back of her hand. On instinct, Marinette grinned and poked the index finger of her free hand to his nose until he stood straight.

And both of them froze, staring at each other with wide eyes.

Distantly, Marinette registered Adrien's driver honking downstairs. She opened her mouth to speak but closed it again silently.

Adrien swallowed. "I have to go."

Marinette watched him disappear down the stairs, still silent as the trapdoor closed.



Adrien swallowed, staring up at the trapdoor that led to Marinette's balcony. His hands shook and he clenched them into fists to make them stop. He lost track of how many breaths he took in an effort to calm his nerves.

"Kid." Plagg poked him in the chest and Adrien jumped. "Just go up there."

"Everything changes after this."

He swallowed again, meeting acid eyes peeking out of the pocket in his shirt. Plagg shrugged, settling back into position.

"Then don't talk about it. The two of you can dance around the truth for a couple years and reminisce about how much time you wasted."

Plagg opened one eye to meet the half-hearted glare Adrien sent his direction, only lifting one brow in acknowledgement. He pawed at his nose and yawned widely, eye shutting again.

"Well, unless you want to pretend you don't suspect who she is and you want to move on—"

“There isn’t going to *be* anyone else, Plagg.”

“Then you’re gonna have to go up there and say something instead of standing in her room like a weirdo.”

Adrien’s eyes slammed shut and he let his head drop, ignoring Plagg’s wiggling in his pocket. Sucking in a deep breath, he squeezed his hands a couple more times before taking the steps up.

He stepped carefully over Marinette’s bed and eased the door open quietly. Once outside, he dropped the door back into place and turned to face the railing where Marinette stood with her back to him. The clouds were dark overhead, making the early afternoon fade into dusk but the city was bright behind her form all the same.

Marinette’s hair was down, loose around her shoulders as she leaned over the balcony to watch people passing by below. Prying his fingers back open from their fists, he crossed the small space to stand next to her. Marinette leaned her shoulder onto his.

Adrien blew out a rapid breath. “Having fun people-watching?”

She hummed, smiling down at the evening crowds. “Yeah, I am. I like making up stories about their lives, wondering what they do when they go home.”

“Why is that?”

“*The clouds were dark overhead, making the early afternoon fade into dusk but the city was bright behind her form all the same.*”

Marinette licked her lips, frowning and not meeting his eyes. On a deep breath, she turned toward him but continued to stare at the bustle below.

“It feels important. To know that they’ve all got lives and families and—” She cut herself off with a wave of her hand, jaw muscles tightening as she swallowed the last of the sentence.

Adrien turned his head, watching the people to try and see what she did. He rubbed his nose, resting one hand on the rail next to Marinette’s.

“And?”

A shaky laugh escaped her. “And it makes me think about the fact that they’re worth the effort.”

“Worth the effort of knowing them, you mean?” He swallowed, mouth dry. Marinette huffed, a humorless puff of air. She turned from the rail to meet Adrien’s eyes.

“Sure.”

He lifted one hand to scratch at the back of his neck before closing his eyes.

On one hand, Plagg was right and they would be better off talking instead of dancing around it.

On the other, he wasn’t ready yet.

She was his best friend. His confidante in every form. He wasn’t ready for things to change. She would let him avoid the subject until he was ready to move forward and talk about it.

Which really wasn’t fair to do to her.

“*She was his best friend.
His confidante in every
form.*”

His hands came up to scrub his face and Adrien blew out the breath he’d been holding. Turning back over the edge of the railing, he leaned on his forearms. While his eyes were closed Marinette had flung her arms over the side and allowed her hair to fall over her face as she stared at the rooftop.

“Back on my second day in school I asked you if it was the first time we’d met.”

Marinette jumped, lifting her head and furrowing her brow. She blinked before shaking her head. “Yeah, you did. Why?”

“You said you’d been trying to figure out why I seemed familiar too, if I remember.”

Marinette nodded, the frown still in place.

Adrien turned his upper body to face toward her while gripping the rail, knuckles going white. “Who was it I reminded you of?”

Marinette’s shoulders dropped at the same time her eyebrows smoothed and relaxed. A tiny smile appeared around the corners of her mouth. Rolling her lips inward, she met his eyes evenly before responding.

“You kind of remind me of Chat Noir, to be honest.” She giggled, eyes dropping. “Though at the time I thought he was pretty weird, a silly cat boy trying to be a superhero.”

Adrien frowned, puffing his lower lip out. Marinette laughed harder.

“But it turns out he’s surprisingly sweet.” She looked up through her eyelashes and Adrien felt his heart stutter. He reached for her hands, a shameless grin spreading across his face.

“Yeah?”

“Mmmhmm. He’s always got my back.”

Adrien opened his mouth to reply, but only managed to splutter when a raindrop hit him in the nose. Glaring at the sky only earned him several more raindrops to the face as the sky opened up with a steady shower. Marinette laughed, tilting her head back and closing her eyes.

“He always makes me feel powerful. Strong. Like I can take on the world.”

Bringing a hand up to his face without releasing hers, Adrien wiped the drops from his eyes. He watched her smile.

“I love the rain.” Marinette’s eyes dropped to his again. “It always feels like a new beginning.”

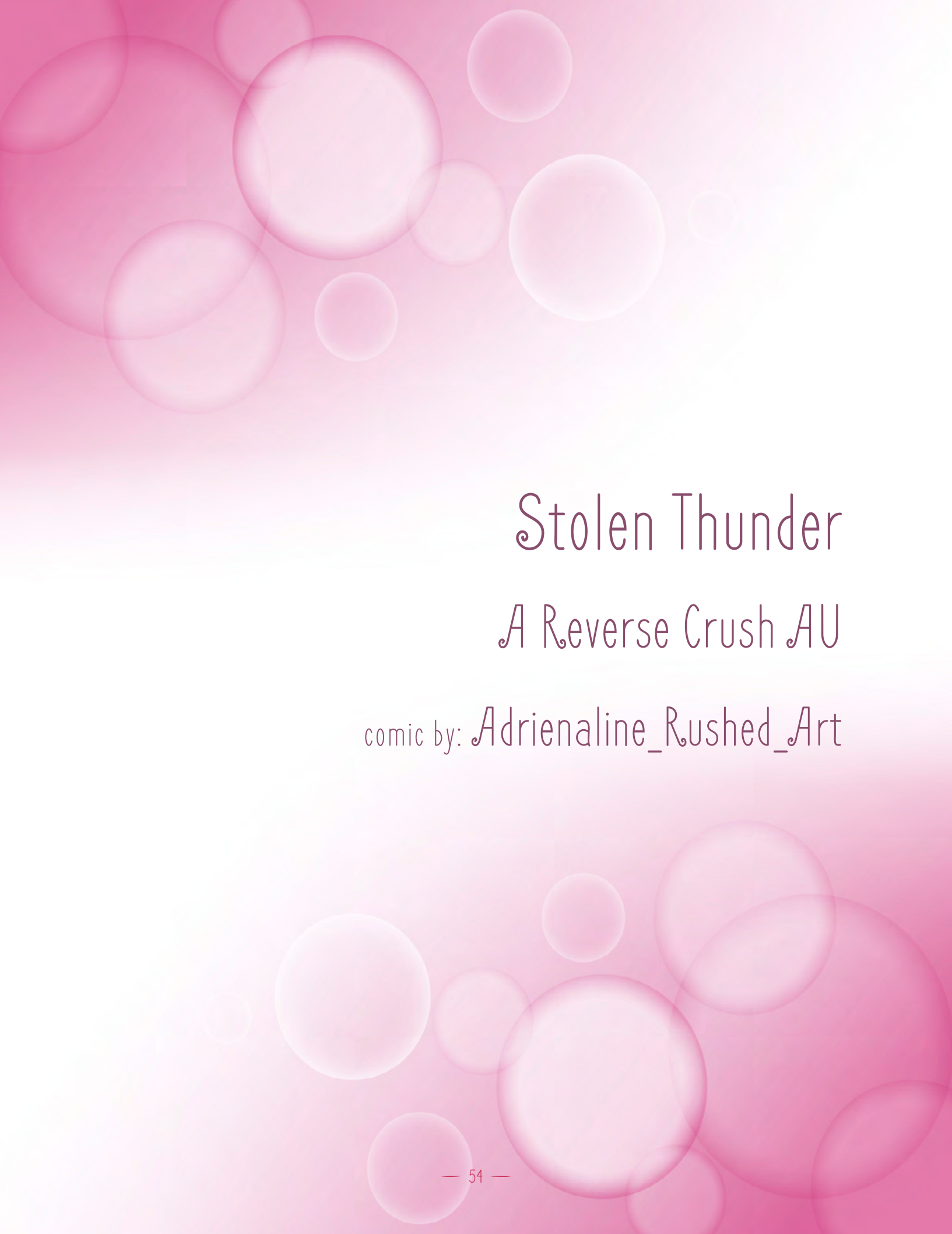
Adrien nodded, desperate to regain his composure before speaking. He had to clear his throat twice before he could manage words. Marinette’s smile turned into a grin to match his. Wrinkling his nose, he lifted her hands to his mouth.

Breathing deeply, he pressed a kiss to the back of each hand. “So when did you meet Chat Noir, My Lady?”

Marinette went pink, and Adrien’s heart slammed into his ribs just as painfully as it did the day they’d met. She swallowed, blinking slowly at him like she was trying to commit the moment to memory.

“Probably about the time you met Ladybug, Chaton.”

THE END

The background is a soft pink gradient with numerous overlapping circles of varying sizes and opacities, creating a bokeh-like effect.

Stolen Thunder

A Reverse Crush AU

comic by: *Adrienaline_Rushed_Art*

Stolen Thunder

A Reverse Crush AU

ADRIEN
ALINE
RUSHED-ART

RUMBLE

um...

Don't you think
that umbrella
would be better
off ~~off~~ OVER
your head?

Huh!?

...Oh!

Gkh!

SPLASH

snort

Guh...
why did I
do that?
Ha ha..

Well, I
guess this
won't

do me
any good
now.

Listen, I'm sorry
about today. About Chloe.
I really was trying
help, but I can't blame you
for being skeptical about someone
who's friends with Chloe. I'll do
my best to help make it right.
Here, one of us should
get to use this.

I-

Thank you... I'm sorry
I didn't believe you before.
I think I do now. You seem really
trustworthy. You really shouldn't be
apologizing, especially on your friend's behalf.
I was a little upset, but that doesn't mean
I think you deserve to catch a cold, you know.
You should take care of yourself, too.

RUMBLE

Truce?

No Such Thing as Bad Publicity

by: GalahadWilder

BETA: SariahSue

When Adrien tries to defend Marinette on air, he accidentally reignites the “Pajama Girl” rumors, causing every reporter in Paris to mob Marinette in the belief that she’s Adrien’s girlfriend.

It’s a little weird to see Alec Cataldi outside of the TVi studios—Adrien is so used to seeing him in the midst of Akuma attacks, rescuing him from the consequences of his own reckless brand of “journalism,” that the very idea of him stepping outside of one of his myriad game show venues doesn’t quite seem to process. He wishes Nadja were here interviewing him instead. Nadja is forceful and reckless, but she’s also whip-smart, smart enough to know where the boundaries are. Unfortunately, though Nadja was available and even *offered*, Adrien’s father had specifically requested Cataldi for this interview. Adrien’s not even sure why. He’s pretty sure Gabriel hates the man.

Adrien shifts uncomfortably in his handmade, tailored white-and-silver suit as the crew bustles around the studio, ignoring him entirely until the moment he’s useful to them. The expert stitching of the shirt brushes against his skin, and his heartbeat calms—he’s glad that, for the first time he can remember, his designer actually paid attention to the fabrics Adrien prefers instead of thoughtlessly putting him through sensory hell. Of course, given who the designer is, that’s not surprising.

“We’re rolling in two!” Cataldi calls to the camera crew, all of whom grumble. Adrien can imagine why—announcing that is clearly someone else’s job.

Adrien takes a moment to breathe, then glances to his left, where the designer of the ensemble he’s wearing sits trembling in an expertly handmade cerulean dress. He reaches over and grips her, leaning toward her. “You okay?” he whispers.

Marinette squeezes her lips shut and nods tightly, but he can still feel her hand shaking in his. Every part of her is tight. He can't blame her—she's never been one for the spotlight, and every time he can remember her being on TV has been a disaster.

"I'm right next to you," he says, giving her a squeeze. "You'll do great."

She turns to him with a limp smile, and he can see she wants to thank him for his reassurance, but when she parts her lips to speak, nothing comes out.

That won't do. He smiles at her, as brilliant and reassuring a smile as he can manage. "I believe in you," he murmurs. "And I'll be right there to catch you if something goes wrong."

She smiles at him, eyes shining. "Thank—thank you," she murmurs.

"We're rolling in five, four, three..." Cataldi turns toward the camera, the light begins to blink green, and immediately Adrien can feel Marinette tense up against his arm.

"Hello, Paris!" Cataldi cries with his characteristic paper-thin swooping enthusiasm, bouncing in his chair in an exaggerated parody of excitement. "We're here at the Hôtel De Ville with famed model Adrien Agreste, and the winner of the Agreste 'Solitude' Design Contest, Mademoiselle Marinette Dupain-Cheng!"

Marinette's smile grows tight as she waves shyly to the camera, then immediately seems to notice that Adrien *isn't* and drops her hand, and her eyes. She shrinks into herself immediately, and Adrien barely fights the urge to throw himself between her and the camera.

"*You're doing fine*," he whispers from the corner of his mouth.

"Monsieur Agreste, why don't you tell us about the piece you were modeling tonight?"

Adrien smiles, not letting any of his annoyance show. "I think that's a bit unfair, Alec," he says. "It's Marinette's piece, after all." He turns to the camera, waving his hand in front of his face with a slight smirk. "I'm just the pretty face who got lucky enough to wear it."

"But it's a tribute to *your* mother," Marinette says, and suddenly her voice has steel in it again. Adrien's heart leaps at the sound. *There* she is, the brilliant, strong, vivacious girl he knows is inside. Just had to wait for her to get a bit indignant. "I think you have the right to have it be special to you."

"Why don't you tell us a bit about the ensemble?" Alec says.

Marinette immediately straightens a little further, a little stronger, a little more iron. “It was inspired by Emilie Graham de Vanily’s role in *Solitude*...” she begins, and Adrien lets himself get lost in her as she starts her spiel.

Watching Marinette in her element is mesmerizing. She’s like a soft hurricane, a riptide, her knowledge and enthusiasm sweeping him away like a force of nature, gentle and yet completely inexorable. Her energy fills the entire studio, and Adrien reflects—not for the first time—on how lucky he is to have someone like her in his life.

“Now, Mademoiselle Dupain-Cheng,” Alec says, turning to her with a grin. “You’re a classmate of Adrien’s, aren’t you?”

“*Watching Marinette in her element is mesmerizing. She’s like a soft hurricane, a riptide...*”

Marinette nods, and Adrien is proud to see that all of the shakiness is gone from her bearing. The girl is pure iron now, proud and confident. “He and I have been in classes together for almost a year now,” she says. “We’ve been friends since...” she glances at him. “Pretty much the day after we met.”

Adrien laughs. “Of course,” he says, meeting Marinette’s eyes with a sly look, “I didn’t actually *know* that. I thought she disliked me for *months*.”

Marinette smiles back at him, though it’s a little watery.

“So,” Alec says, leaning forward. “You entered a fashion contest, knowing that if you won your classmate would be wearing your design? That’s pretty brave of you.”

Marinette turns back to Alec. “Well, I wasn’t planning to originally,” she says. “I was afraid it would’ve been weird—but Adrien actually *asked* me to.” She looks over at him with kind eyes. “This contest was a tribute to his mother, and he said...” She tilts her head. “What was it you said, Adrien?”

Adrien smiles softly. “I said, ‘you’re the one who knows me best.’” He turns to look at Alec. “She knows how important this contest is to me, so I knew she’d do it justice.”

Alec smiles again, but this time Adrien can sniff something predatory in it, and he immediately tenses. “I can see that you and Adrien care a lot about each other, Mademoiselle Dupain-Cheng,” Alec says. “Now, one thing that’s got a lot of our

viewers curious—a few months ago, you became infamous as the ‘Pajama Girl’ who helped Adrien disappear from a crowd of fans.”

Adrien’s stomach immediately curls up like a stink bug, and he feels Marinette’s presence violently shrink at the mention. This was not where the interview should have been going.

Please, Cataldi, don’t go where I think you’re going—

“Ever since then, there’s been a rumor that you and Adrien are secretly dating,” Cataldi says, and Adrien’s stomach drops as he glances at Marinette, notices how the iron in her has vanished, how small she looks right now. “Is there any truth to those—”

“No,” Adrien interrupts, a little more forcefully than needed. “She and I are just friends, Alec.”

“Really?” Alec replies, leaning forward. “Because I’ve got an episode of *Fill My Shoes* that says otherwise.”

The entire studio falls silent in that moment. The camera crew is looking at Cataldi in horror, and Adrien feels his lip curl. How *dare* he bring that up? How *dare* he try to humiliate Marinette in front of the entire city like this?

Adrien’s almost certain he can hear the flap of butterfly wings underneath the rush of blood in his ears, but he’s equally certain that he doesn’t care.

“I’m sure we all remember the Adrien shrine—”

Adrien is on his feet. He doesn’t know how he got there, but he knows that right now he’s standing in between Alec and Marinette, hackles raised. He levels the full force of the God of Destruction behind his eyes, boring down into the suddenly very, very small Alec Cataldi. “If you don’t stop talking *right now*,” he growls, menace rolling off him in waves, “I’ll make sure you *never work in television again*.”

For a moment, the room is dead-silent. Bone-chillingly. There’s nothing in the universe except him, Cataldi, and the utter *rage* that Adrien is feeling—how *dare* this man attack his Princess, how *dare* he try to humiliate her, how *dare* he—and then suddenly there are tiny, vise-like fingers wrapped around his wrist, tugging him down.

“Adrien!” Marinette hisses into his ear. “Cameras!”

He glances up, sees the crew behind the camera, sees them staring at him, and everything suddenly snaps back into place. Suddenly realizes that all of Paris has just seen him lose his composure, that his *father* has just seen—oh no. Oh, no, this is—this is bad.

But then he looks down at Marinette's face, at the way she's shaking, and he thinks... *worth it*.



Nino jabs the space bar with his middle finger, pausing the playback. "That's what did it?"

Adrien swallows and nods, the hair on the back of his head scratching against his pillow, his hand covering his eyes. "That's what did it."

Nino leans forward onto Adrien's desk, sliding his fingers underneath his glasses and massaging the heels of his palms into his eyes. "Bro," he says. "20 out of 20 for the sentiment, but... maybe a 4 for the execution." He leans back, swiveling the chair to look at Adrien, framed from behind by the massive windows of Adrien's bedroom. "I don't think I've seen anything backfire harder since the last time Chloé bought you a Christmas present."

Adrien sits up and stares out the huge window, looking wistfully across the park to the crowd of reporters and fans attempting to surreptitiously stake out the front of the Dupain-Cheng Boulangerie. "I was just trying to get them to leave her alone," he mumbles.

Nino wryly holds up one of the trashy tabloid magazines scattered across Adrien's desk, emblazoned with a shot of Marinette taken from the fashion show, entitled *Mystery Mademoiselle Steals Adrien's Heart*. "Nice job," he says in a tone that somehow implies a nonexistent slow clap. "Well done."

Adrien flops back onto his bed and groans over the crinkle of *Oo La Laa! Adrien's Showing Sparks!* between his back and the comforter. "I need to apologize to her *so badly*," he says.

"Yeah," Nino grumbles in response, turning back to the computer. "For a *lot* of things."

Adrien groans. "No kidding."

Nino rewinds the video and starts playing it again, watching it intently until Adrien hears his own voice hissing like a cornered cat. Nino jabs the spacebar again, then turns around. “Dude,” he says, gesturing to the computer screen. “If I were just some rando watching that? *I’d* think you two were dating.”

Adrien rolls over. “Don’t even,” he grumbles, staring at his floor. “You *know* she’s just a friend.”

Nino is silent for a moment. “... Is she, though?” he says, finally.

What?

Adrien blinks. He’s heard lots of people talk about him and Marinette like this before, but they’re people who never really knew him, so it was easy to dismiss. This? This is Nino. Nino has insinuated, maybe, but they were all jokes.

“*Adrien sits up and stares out the huge window, looking wistfully across the park...*”

This isn’t a joke. Nino is dead serious.

Adrien sits up, looks at Nino with his head tilted. “What do you mean?” he says.

Nino leans forward, elbows on his knees. “Dude, have you *seen* the way you look at her?” he says. “There is a *reason* why the most popular real-person ship in Paris is Adrien Agreste/Pajama Girl. Why do you keep insisting she’s just a friend?” He points at the screen. “Man, I’m your best friend, and you and I *both* know you’d never do that for me.”

Adrien’s heart crunches. “Of—of course I would!” he stammers. He... he would . He would?

No. No, he... he wouldn’t.

Oh, cats, he wouldn’t.

Nino smiles. “Come on, man,” he says. “I don’t mind. You have something with Mari that you ain’t got with me. I don’t mind.”

Adrien grimaces. This is not how he saw his day going. What is he supposed to do about this? “Okay, but...”

Nino points at him. “No buts, dude.” He leans back in the swivel chair, steepling his fingers. “Face it: you’re in love with Marinette.”

“Isn’t everyone though?”

That... was not what he meant to say. He didn’t—he didn’t even know that was what he thought. But... it’s right, isn’t it? It makes sense. Marinette is so incredible.

He looks at Nino for confirmation, but Nino is only staring at him in confusion. Adrien’s stomach tightens a bit. What he said—it’s not *that* weird, is it?

Nino’s lips tighten. “You’re gonna have to run that logic by me, bro.”

Adrien blinks, pulls his legs in and crosses them against the comforter. It makes perfect sense to him. “I mean... that—that’s normal, right? It’s not weird or anything for... for, you know.”

Nino’s brows knit downward in confusion. “Why would it be weird?”

Adrien shrugs, twisting the comforter between his fingers. “I don’t... know?” he says. “I mean, she’s cute and brave and clever and creative and everything, and, you know, she just... everyone’s sort of in love with her, right?”

Nino sits forward in the chair, his face tightening.

“I—I mean... *you* were?” Adrien continues. This whole situation is starting to get weird. He’s never thought about any of this before, but it makes perfect sense to him; why doesn’t Nino get it? “And then there’s Nathaniel, and Luka, and Kim, and—and Kagami’s said some things, you know, and Chloé can’t stop talking about her, and I’m pretty sure I’ve seen *Alya* looking at her, you know?”

Nino raises an eyebrow. “I mean, you’re not wrong,” he says, “but I still don’t see your point.”

Adrien sighs, staring at his feet. “Marinette’s just... that girl everyone’s in love with. You know?” And she is. Everyone he knows is at least a little bit in love with Marinette Dupain-Cheng. “If I am a bit too... it doesn’t really have to *mean* anything.”

Nino tilts his head. “So what you’re saying is... your feelings about Marinette don’t count?”

Adrien nods. “I don’t know much about being, you know, a normal teenager? But I’m pretty sure being in love with Marinette is part of it.”

Nino stares at him, eyes wide, and then buries his face in his hands. “Oh, God,” he says. “How are you *this dumb?*”

“Hey!” Adrien yelps, barely covering the snicker that comes from his shirt pocket. “I’m not—it’s not—”

Nino scoots the chair forward, placing a hand on Adrien’s shoulder. “Dude,” he says. “Just because other people have feelings for her, *that doesn’t mean your feelings aren’t valid.*”

Adrien bites his lip. “It’s—not like my feelings for her are special,” he says. “Besides, Mari’s way out of my league. She’d never like a guy like me.”

Nino blinks. “Dude...aren’t you chasing Ladybug?”

Adrien’s brain locks up. “That’s—that’s different!” he says, turning to look at the fire pole in his room. He can’t meet Nino’s eyes.

“How is that different!” Nino says.

“She might actually go for me!” Adrien cries—then his heart immediately freezes as he realizes his mistake.

Nino pinches the bridge of his nose. “Wait,” he says. “Are you telling me... that you think *Marinette* is out of your league... but Ladybug *isn’t*.”

Adrien’s jaw locks up. As Chat Noir, he actually stands a *chance* with Ladybug—but he can’t exactly explain that to Nino.

“Holy crap, bro, you *do*,” Nino breathes. He blinks, shaking his head. “You’re gonna have to explain that to me.”

Adrien swallows. “I... I can’t.”

Nino pinches his sinuses. “Dude,” he says, “why do you think literally *everybody* but you sees her shrine as evidence of... *something?*”

“She doesn’t see me like that, Nino!” Adrien protests.

Nino raises an eyebrow, then sighs. “Okay, look,” he says. “Can we at least admit that you have feelings for Marinette?”

“*Marinette’s just...
that girl everyone’s in love
with. You know?*”

Adrien opens his mouth to reflexively deny it, but something inside him says *no*. The little voice—it sounds remarkably like Ladybug, like the most brave and intelligent person that he knows, and he can't ignore it. *You do have feelings for her, and you finally realized it.*

What he says instead is, “We need to help her.”



Slipping past the paparazzi near *Adrien's* house is easy enough. Adrien's been doing it for a year now, pretty much every time there's another fashion show, and if he's agile enough to beat his father's “impenetrable” security system, he's agile enough to avoid the gaze of a few camera crazies. Chat Noir training is quite handy for civilian things sometimes. (The question is, why is *Nino* agile enough to follow him almost step-for-step—Nino's an in-shape guy, sure, but he's never been the most athletic. Maybe it's all the chasing after *Alya* he does during *Akuma* attacks?)

Still, within minutes, they're both over the back fence, walking toward the Dupain-Cheng Bakery with no one the wiser.

“You've got a plan, right?” Nino says as they amble nonchalantly through the park. “Please tell me you've got a plan.”

“Sort of?” Adrien says. He glances backward across the park toward his mansion, fingers crossed, hoping that nobody has seen and followed them. “Marinette doesn't know how to deal with paparazzi like I do, so this has got to be freaking her out.”

“So you're gonna... what, exactly?”

“*You do have feelings for her, and you finally realized it.*”

Adrien's mouth compresses to a line. “I gotta talk to her in person,” he says, looking up at the wall between him and Marinette's bedroom. Plenty of slats, plenty of windows. An easy enough climb for Chat Noir. For Adrien, though?

Big maybe.

Nino looks at him incredulously. “Dude,” he says, glancing back and forth between his friend and the bakery. “Are you—no. There's no way you're just gonna... Spider-Man into her room—”

Adrien raises an eyebrow. “Why not?”

“Because it’s *nuts*, bro!” Nino says, jabbing his finger at Adrien’s chest. “That’s— not really a thing that normal people do... and also it’s kind of... *super* not platonic.”

Adrien swallows, looking down at the finger pressed against his sternum. “We’ll... cross that last bridge when we come to it,” he says.

Nino crosses his arms. “So you *are* admitting that this is romantic.”

Adrien throws his arms up as he walks past the fountain. “I don’t know, okay!”

Nino sighs. “And how are you planning to do that without *all of Paris* seeing you?”

Adrien smiles. *That*, he’s planned for. “I got backup,” he says, pointing at a park bench... where a suspiciously Adrien-esque figure sits.

“Hi!” Wayhem waves from a park bench, dressed in his “pretending-to-be-Adrien” clothes. “How’ve you two been? Haven’t seen you since the party!”

“Hey, Way!” Adrien says, clasping Wayhem’s hand to initiate their secret handshake. “Been pretty good.”

Wayhem smiles, turning to Nino. “Adrien sent me your newest track,” he says. “It was *awesome*, dude!”

“Thanks, man,” Nino says, repeating the complicated handshake routine.

Wayhem turns back to Adrien. “You needed my help with something?” he says, expectant.

Adrien smiles. “You saw the interview from yesterday, right?”

“Of course,” Wayhem says. “I watch all your interviews.” He glances toward the bakery, still mobbed with reporters—from this close, Adrien can see Tom Dupain’s giant frame looming over the reporters, apparently having no luck in intimidating them into leaving. “How’s Marinette?”

“She needs our help,” Adrien says. He turns back to Nino. “The ‘Pajama Girl’ discussion gave me an idea on how to deal with this,” he says. “Wayhem pretended to be me once before in order to throw off the crowds, so I figure I can use myself as a distraction, get the paparazzi chasing *him*, and then sneak in with no issue.”

Nino nods. “So the plan is...”

“Catch their attention as me,” Adrien says, “then swap out with Way, and let them chase him while I get to Marinette.”

Nino nods. “Where do I come in?” he says.

Adrien pulls out his phone and waves it. “I need you to keep me updated on where the photographers are so I know when it’s safe,” he says.



Adrien clambers over the railing to Marinette’s balcony with a little more difficulty than usual. He’s used to doing this in a magical, strength-enhancing catsuit, not with his unaugmented fingers, and his muscles are already weak and shaking, but it’s worth it just to be up here. Just to see her.

Okay, Nino’s point is starting to make a little more sense now.

He leans backward against the railing for a moment and wipes his forehead with the back of his arm, trying to catch his breath. Without Kwami magic, that climb was more than a bit beyond what he’s used to, and he wants to take a few seconds to recover before he actually sees her.

He must look like a mess.

“Ah, twuu wuv,” he hears from inside his shirt pocket. “Gone to see your girlfriend?”

“Shut up, Plagg,” he mumbles, slapping at his shirt.

The small cackle he hears in response tells him that the Kwami isn’t really listening.

He hears a creak as the trapdoor opens, and his heart bursts into overdrive. He’s not ready for her to see him—he had a whole plan, everything he was going to say to her, but it’s suddenly gone from his head. What was he going to say? Is she going to be mad at him for the position he’s put her in?

The trapdoor cracks open, and the first thing he sees is the stunning blue of her eyes—a very *angry* blue. “Goddammit, Chat!” she hisses. “Someone could’ve seen—”

Her eyes lock with his, and her voice chokes off entirely. “A-Adrien?” she yelps, and suddenly the trapdoor falls shut with a very Marinette-y shriek, followed by the *thump* of body landing hard on mattress.

His heart leaps up to strangle his throat, and he leaps forward, throwing himself at the ground and flinging open the trapdoor. “Mari?” he says, breathless.

“Ad—Adrien?” Marinette splutters, splayed out on the bed. “Wh-what, what are, um, what are... you doing here?”

Adrien opens his mouth, but as soon as he does, all of the words he was planning to say escape him. He’s forgotten every single reason he came here, everything he was going to say, and instead all he can see is the deep, deep blue of her eyes.

“Why did you think I was Chat Noir?” is the first thing that comes to mind. He immediately regrets saying it.

Marinette’s face reddens, and she rolls onto her side with a groan, covering her face with her hands. “He... likes to drop by, sometimes,” she says. She glances back up at him. “Not—! It’s not, like, a romantic thing. We’re—we’re not dating! Or, or anything.”

“*His heart leaps up to strangle his throat, and he leaps forward, throwing himself at the ground...*”

Adrien feels a sudden pang of disappointment. Hadn’t she said she was in love with Chat? With *him*?

“I know,” he says, climbing down into the bed next to her and crossing his legs. “Chat only has eyes for Ladybug.”

Marinette breathes in, still facing away from him. “Yeah,” she says, her voice small. She twists her head to look at him. “What are you doing here?” she says. “Not—! Not that I’m not happy to see you, I just... I don’t...”

Adrien smiles in a manner he hopes is calming. “I’m sorry,” he says. “I just—” He scratches the back of his neck. “I keep putting you in these situations where everyone’s mobbing you.”

Marinette rolls into a sitting position. “It’s—it’s not so bad,” she says, clutching her wrist. “You don’t need to apologize.”

He reaches out, to reassure her, but he stops. With the way he’s feeling... he wants to touch her, to be in contact with her. That’s not weird—but the context has changed, and there’s something different about the energy of it. And something about it feels like he’s... taking advantage of her somehow.

“I wanted to help,” he says, withdrawing his hand. “I just—I know how to deal with paparazzi.”

She looks up at him, one eyebrow cocked and a tiny smirk. “So you... climbed my house to give me advice on *reporters*?”

Adrien swallows. “No, I—” He looks away. “I wanted to see you,” he murmurs.

Marinette blinks and leans forward, her comforter skwooshing under her knees. “Adrien?” she says, confused. Expectant.

“People keep saying we’re dating,” he says, his eyes wandering her wall of pictures of him. There are a *lot* of them. “Does that—bother you?”

That’s not the question he wants to ask. Not the question he *needs* to ask. But it’s the closest he can bear to, right now.

Marinette leans forward, her head tilted. “Adrien?” she says.

“*She looks up at him, one eyebrow cocked and a tiny smirk.*”

He looks back at her, barely managing to meet her eyes, and he’s about to speak when suddenly his phone begins to buzz in his pocket.

“Oh, *no*,” he says, his heart dropping at the sound of Nino’s familiar ringtone. He swipes the phone from his pocket and presses it to his face. “Nino?”

“*Not all of the reporters got distracted*,” Nino says, without preamble. “*Someone got a shot of you climbing the building to get to Marinette’s room and posted it online.*”

“Oh,” Adrien whispers. “Oh no.” He glances back at Marinette, then back to the window. “How bad?”

“*Three hundred comments in four minutes. Everyone thinks you’ve gone full Romeo, and your fan club is **not happy**.*”

Adrien’s eyes widen. “Akuma?” he says.

“Akuma,” Nino confirms. “*Some girl screaming about how she’s going to ‘rescue’ you from ‘that hussy.’*”

“What’s the Akuma?” Marinette says.

Adrien turns to her, and he's bowled over to see that all of the nervousness and fear is gone. There's the iron again, the hurricane wrapped in skin, like she's about to fistfight the whole world.

"Nino?" he says, not taking his eyes off Marinette. "What are her powers?"

Before Nino can answer, Adrien catches something out of the corner of his eye. A movement—something that *shouldn't* be moving. Tiny, small motions. Just enough to catch his attention.

The pictures of him on Marinette's wall—they're coming alive.



Adrien dashes down the alleyway, dragging Marinette along behind him. Every single picture of him in Paris has come to life as a two-dimensional golem, capable of cutting through any material; he and Marinette are both already covered in shallow cuts from barely-dodged construct attacks. They barely made it out of her room—there were too many of him.

"Adrien, let me go!" Marinette shrieks, trying to yank herself out of his grip.

"No!" Adrien yells back. "Not until you're safe!"

Adrien wants, more than anything, to be Chat Noir right now. He'd be able to get Marinette clear with no trouble, to protect her without worrying about getting hurt. As it stands, though, he can't leave her without worrying about losing her to the Akuma, and even though he knows Ladybug will bring her back if something happens to her, *he can't let her get hurt*. But as long as he can't find somewhere safe to put her, he can't get away, can't transform.

Where is Ladybug? She should *be* here by now! He needs to get Marinette to safety, and he can't do that while the Akuma is zeroed in on them!

They reach the end of the alleyway—it's a dead end. Adrien reaches for his back, for the baton, before suddenly remembering that he's not Chat Noir right now; he doesn't have it, he can't carry Marinette up onto the roofs. They're *trapped*.

"Why can't you just *leave me be?*" Marinette huffs, ripping her wrist from his hand. "It's safer if we split up!"

“Marinette,” Adrien says, clutching her shoulders. “There’s an *army* of mes, and I’m *not leaving you to face them alone.*”

He hears a cackle from overhead, and looks up just in time to see a tiny Adrien on the fire escape dive at Marinette’s head. Adrien wraps his arms around her, tackling her to the ground just before it can embed itself in her skull.

“I’m not leaving you,” he reiterates, breathless.

She stares up at him, eyes wide and face red. She’s breathless too, and suddenly he realizes—he’s on top of her, bodily, and all of his muscles freeze at once.

“Adrien?” she whispers. Her eyes are shining, and he can’t tell what’s in them but he’s drowning in her, and he realizes—he doesn’t care if she knows who he is. She was Multimouse, she’s Marinette, she’s his Mari, his Princess, and he—he needs to protect her, and Cataclysm the consequences.

“I’m sorry,” he says. “But I need to get you clear.”

The Adrien cutout regroups for another leap, but he snatches it before it can, feeling it bite into the skin of his palm. He sucks in a breath as razor-hot fire slices across his hand, but he’s got the cutout, ripping it in half is as easy as breathing. He opens his hand, lets it flutter away into the wind.

He glances up. There’s no cutouts around them, no eyes, no cameras—nobody except him and Marinette. But that won’t last long. There’s a swarm of Adriens just around the corner, no other way out, and if he doesn’t get her out of here *now* there won’t be enough of either of them left for Ladybug to put back together.

“Adrien—” Marinette begins again, but he holds up a hand.

“Claws Out!” he cries.



Ten rooftops away, Chat Noir sets Marinette back on her feet. “You okay?” he says.

Marinette stumbles backward, her face twisting. “Am—am I—you just—” She throws her hands upward. “How are you—what, what are—”

“Marinette?” Chat says. His arms are up, ready to catch her if she falls—it’s a long fall.

“How could you be so stupid!” Marinette shrieks, jabbing her finger into his sternum, right under his bell.

Chat stumbles backwards. “Marinette?”

“You just revealed your identity to a *civilian*, Chat!” she yells. She stomps back, turns on her heel.

“You’re not a civilian, Princess,” he says, following her step for step. “You—Ladybug chose you to be Multimouse!”

“And I got *fired!*” Marinette says, wheeling around on him. “I got fired for a *reason*, Chat!” She jabs him in the chest again. “I wasn’t! Careful! With my! Identity!”

“Princess,” he says. She’s right, he knows she’s right, but he needs her to be safe, *needed* her to be safe, and he can’t regret the decision he’s made—

“Why would you be so *careless?*” she cries. “Adrien—Chat—you...”

“Because I’m in love with you!”

Marinette freezes. Then, weakly: “W-what?”

Chat runs his claw through his hair. “I’ve...” He chuckles once, wryly. “I’ve been denying it for a whole year, but I—I can’t—I thought that, the way I felt about you...” He casts his eyes downward—there aren’t any Adrien cutouts anywhere nearby. They only have a little time. “I thought it was just... normal. That everyone was in love with you.”

Marinette blinks. “Wh...” she begins, her face turning red. “Y—I, wha—you—”

“Marinette?” Chat says. Oh no. He broke her.

She stares at him, eyes wide. “What—what about—about Ladybug?” she whispers.

Chat bites his lip. “I—I don’t know,” he sighs, hanging his head. “I feel the same about her as always, but I—I’m not sure what to do.” He looks around. A few more minutes, no cutouts, but—“Where *is* she?” he murmurs.

“I’m sure she’ll be here soon,” Marinette says. “You should—you should go after the Akuma. I’ll be fine.”

“She stares up at him, eyes wide and face red. She’s breathless too, and suddenly he realizes—he’s on top of her...”

“I can’t leave you alone,” Chat says. “I—I couldn’t bear it if anything happened to you.”

“Hide me,” Marinette says. “Find me somewhere that the Akuma can’t reach, and then *go*.”

“Marinette, please, I can’t—”

“God *damn* it, Adrien, I can’t transform if you won’t *leave me alone!*”

Chat freezes, his mouth open, mid-word. “What?” he says.

Marinette’s eyes widen, and she slaps her hands over her mouth.

“Did you just say—”

“No!” Marinette yelps, rushing forward, slamming her hands over his mouth. “I didn’t say anything!”

“I—I couldn’t bear it if anything happened to you.”

The denial—or rather, the specific words she uses—are all the confirmation he needs. Chat grabs her wrists and pulls her hands down, smirking. “Would’ve been smarter to try and play it off as something else,” he says.

Marinette’s head hangs. “Ugh,” she mumbles. “I know.”

And finally, *finally*, Chat Noir looks at Marinette Dupain-Cheng. *Really* looks at her. Sees more than just his Princess, sees more than just the sweet and strong and clever girl he’s been falling more and more for and refusing to admit it, sees more than the earrings, the pigtails. Sees the iron core inside of her.

“My Lady,” he says, placing his hand over his mouth. “No wonder I fell for you twice.”



The Akuma is a rough battle, but not the worst. Rougher than most, easier than some. But they beat it together, like they always do.

And once it's over, they finally get the time to talk. Alone, away from the crowds, away from their families and friends and, most of all, away from the reporters.

"You know," Adrien says, looking down at his tea, "I never appreciated just how *many* pictures of me you had in your room until they started attacking us."

Marinette sighs, rolling her coffee cup between her hands. "Please," she says, so quietly that he can barely hear her over the coffee shop's ambient music, "don't hate me."

Adrien tilts his head. "Wha—Why would I hate you?" he asks.

Marinette closes her eyes and slumps in her chair, letting her empty coffee cup rattle onto its side on the table between them. "I've been rejecting you for a year," she says. "And... basically stalking you, and, and—"

Adrien reaches out and takes her hand. "It's..." He chokes, then chuckles. "I'm an idiot. And nothing could *ever* make me hate you."

Marinette's face doesn't move, but her eyes reach up, meeting his, expectant, worried.

Adrien leans in, looking up at her through hooded eyes. "I've loved you since we met, *My Lady*."

The tension bleeds from Marinette's frame, and she laughs, shakes her head. "Right," she says. "Right, you're... you're not just Adrien, are you."

"Nope," he says. "Chat Noir, at your service."

She smiles, and relaxes. "It's... easier," she says. "To talk to Chat."

"Because you're in love with Adrien?"

Marinette's eyes widen and her mouth pops open, almost as if to deny it, but then she stops and hangs her head. "Yeah," she murmurs.

Adrien's heart begins to squeeze. This—he can't—this isn't—he can't be this lucky, can he? "How long?"

"Since the umbrella."

Adrien blinks. "You're kidding."

She shakes her head.

Adrien strokes her hand. “Marinette,” he says. “My heart’s been yours since the day we met.”

She looks up, eyes shining, and smiles.



“Okay, now—compare these two photos,” Nino says, laying two pictures on the school desk in front of Adrien. One is a picture of Adrien from three months ago, talking to Marinette. The other, a magazine—the headline reads, *Agreste Speaks About His New Love: “I Didn’t Even Know I was in Love With Her.”* He and Marinette are on the front cover together, and he can’t help smiling at the confidence in her face, the fire in her eyes. The camera caught him in a candid moment, in-between poses, staring at her with hearts in his eyes. He couldn’t be more obviously head-over-heels for her.

He looks back at the first photo, and yep—he’s looking at her exactly the same way. Eyes soft and shining, like she’s the one who hung the stars in the sky.

“Okay,” he says with a smile, throwing his hands in the air. “You got me, and I’m an idiot.”

Alya cackles as the entire class erupts into cheers. “Hell yeah you are, Sunshine!” she says, slapping him on the back. “Glad you finally wised up, though.”

“Took some doing,” he says, shooting a sly glance at his Princess—his Lady—his *girlfriend*. She smiles, shyly, her cheeks pinking.

His chest warms, and he can’t help blowing her a small kiss. Her pink turns red, and she looks away, but he can see the smile grow wider on her face.

He’s been in love with Marinette Dupain-Cheng since the day they met, and now he’s done denying it. He’s hers, now and forever.

THE END



Rain On Me · TheQueenofSpace

The Sun, The Stars, Finally The Moon

by: IAmWhelmed

BETA: Atrickoflights

Years down the line, Marinette appreciates the family and future she and Adrien have created together.

There was something about the grey-white skies of Paris on a rainy day, and one could argue that it was simply the magic of the Parisian lights and the romance of lovers joining hands under wife umbrellas, but she always thought it was in the smell. Adrien's rainforest cologne, his warmth, the way he smiled when she turned her head to bury her face in his sweater, feel the expensive cotton, and her nose brushing against his chest. They'd laid together in bed like that many a rainy morning, and if she recalled, it was one of the few things that soothed her stomach as she'd carried Emma the first six months she was burgeoning from small bud to round-faced cherub. They were in the cafe of her parents bakery, right then, but she could still feel the tangle of his legs around hers, touch the comforter and feel it bridge over her cold shoulders. The sound was the same-- a distant thunder, echoing somewhere behind them, a long, long while away, miles, really, but it still felt so close all the same. Adrien readjusted the wet umbrella under the table so that it wasn't slipping from the center leg, then pulled her closer, hand setting and pressing against her hip, as though she'd fall, as though he was worried she'd become unbalanced (when they both knew she would never). She moved closer, as close as she could with the tight-knit brush of their legs, and reassimilated to the way he held her, then, with her head at his shoulder and not his chest.

“She’s having the time of her life out there.”

“Yeah, well, you get opposed to blue skies when your dad is as bright as the sun itself.” She pinched the little fat she could find at Adrien’s cheek, and he laughed.

“Oh no, is my little girl going to be goth? Am I going to have to listen to Jagged Stone wannabes and pretend I *like it*?”

“Please, Jagged would never let that stand.” His self-proclaimed niece? Listening to *hogwash*? Chloe always said bad press was still press, but she doubted Penny would feel the same way.

Beyond the windows of the Dupain-Cheng bakery, their little Emma Agreste stomped and hopped around in the puddles that collected about the small potholes, dips in the road, any gathering of rainwater she could find in her polka-dot boots. That cherub face she’d had when she first sat in Marinette’s arms and Adrien stroked the thin strands of hair at her head, when she still had small eyes and the fat of her arms still looked like rubber bands clung to her wrists, it’d begun to grow into the face of a child. Only five, of course, but still such a big girl. (She wondered if that’s what her parents meant when they said time passed by too fast, that she’d blink and Emma would be a woman with the stars in her eyes and the confidence to *reach for them*). Her eyes were the same glossy, emerald green that Adrien’s were, and they shined when she lifted her pudgy arms into the sky and smiled and asked to be picked up. Maman said that she looked like Marinette when she was that small, that new. Well, she didn’t know about that, but Adrien said her laugh was the same, and that she was just as gentle when she held Tikki or Plagg in her water-shaped hands and pressed kisses to the tops of their frames.

Marinette saw that Emma had her daddy’s sense of humor, was always causing mischief if they were busy long enough to leave her unattended (typically under the watch of Plagg and Tikki, of course-- mainly Tikki. 90% of the time, Tikki. Because Plagg took Emma’s teeny tiny hijinks streak and turned it up to eleven). She’d once placed a walk-ie-talkie at the kitchen counter and waited until her parents got home to play... a game of hide and seek. She had the other one, and had spent the better part of four hours teasing them and slipping small puns into conversation to lead them in the right direction. (“She’s smart,” Adrien had mumbled upon the clock striking the third hour, “Crafty, too. Can’t imagine where she got that from.” Said with a pointed look in his wife’s direction).

They'd searched the whole house, top to bottom, and still found not a sign of their little one. When the four hour mark hit, they'd paused, then looked at each other, because they thought they could hear Emma's Marinette-like giggles in the walls. ("Emma," Marinette had said into their walkie-talkie. "You better not be in the vents.")

There'd been no response.

Adrien had rubbed the bridge of his nose and sighed. "Plagg, claws out.")

Emma stood in one puddle with her eyes on another, a hefty three feet away for her tiny legs, but her eyes grew dark and narrowed at the challenge. She shifted until her feet were a good width apart, wriggling her butt as she crouched into jumping position, tongue poking out of the corner of her upturned lip. Marinette and Adrien watched in growing amusement as she visibly let out a war cry and threw herself forward, succeeding only in landing face-first in the mud. Marinette snorted. "I'll let Papa know to start a bath."

Adrien grinned. "Nah, not yet. Let her tire herself out first. She'll sleep the whole ride home."

She'd have argued that Emma would stain the clothes that peaked out from behind the slight unzip of her raincoat, but she knew he'd just say "We'll buy her a new shirt" and "Mud is good for the skin", said half-joking, but nevertheless eye-roll worthy. Still, she quite liked the idea of soaking up Adrien's warmth for a few more moments, in the quiet of her parent's empty bakery, just like this. Safe, happy, with his arm around her and their eyes on their little girl as she picked herself up off the ground and tried again. She wondered if they had a baby again, if their eyes would be blue, if they'd look more like Adrien, if they'd have a love for the piano that Emma hadn't yet cultivated, if they'd be more social with other kids the way Marinette was. A friend to the world, Everyday Ladybug. Adrien's hand graced her stomach.

She had a feeling he was thinking about the nine months before they'd met Emma, the way her stomach had bloated and the odd things she'd wanted to eat, from pizza with anchovies (which she usually hated), to milk filled with chocolate and strawberry syrup. He was probably thinking about the nights where she'd lay on her side in their

king size bed, and he'd put his hands at her stomach and listen to Emma kick for hours. She thought he might have been remembering the one-sided conversations he'd have with the bump of her tummy, how he'd told her that she was coming into their world in a home filled with so much love that he swore she'd be running for the hills by the time she hit eighteen, that she'd never, ever be alone so long as he and her mommy were still alive. Adrien had whispered to the kicks under her skin about how she'd have the world at the palm of her hands, that he'd give it all to her and more if he could help it. The way the sun went down and the set of the sky reached like reassuring hands through their balcony doors as he stroked her lower back and pressed slow, warm kisses to the head he couldn't yet hold. She'd run her hands through his hair, and smile to herself as the soothing quiet of the approaching night and its undaunted stars flicked to life.

"Adrien?"

"Hmm?"

"Do you have anything planned September 7th?"

Adrien tilted his head, brows furrowing, then he laughed and shook from side-to-side. "I don't usually plan that far ahead, Princess, you know that." And she did. She knew that well. Adrien was a spur-of-the-moment romantic, who liked to sweep her off her feet at the most impromptu moments.

The same could be said about his approach to work. She made plans, weeks and months ahead of time, as was expected of a world famous designer (what with shows and interviews and guest appearances), while Adrien had broken free of a hectic, programmed docket and never looked back.

"Just wondering", she lied.

She reached down and rested her hands upon his, where it still sat, running calming circles into her perfectly flat stomach. She smiled into his shoulder, closing her eyes

"Safe, happy, with his arm around her and their eyes on their little girl as she picked herself up off the ground..."

and soaking in the thunder that was ever-distant, and ever-near to her heart. Adrien had given her the stars and the bright white of the sun, and in return, she'd give him the moon in all its gorgeous pioneering glory. In seven months, their family's night sky would be as brilliant as ever. "Adrien."

"Yes, Princess?" He smiled down at her, and she reached up with her free hand to cup his turned cheek, leaning up to press her lips to his warm encompassing ones. He smiled into her, soaking her love up the way a cat lapped at milk, a happy purr lurring her closer as he rose one hand to cherish the line of her jaw. Everything about him, always, made her feel like the clouds that kissed the sun as they came home. Let the thunder be the union of their hands and lips, for they'd pass the umbrella to their little one(s) and await the day they found their own *avoir un coup de foudre*.

THE END



Under the Stars · Zannolin

Pluvial

By: Djaeka

Marinette is kind but she isn't dumb. Someone who has been lifelong friends with Chloe deserves a wide berth, even the new boy Adrien does seem much more friendly. She's willing to give him a chance but he's gonna have to prove he's not a bully first.
Step one: Bring him home and feed him.

Marinette sighed heavily, holding a hand out to catch the raindrops falling from the roof of the school.

Her mother had called her name on the way out the door earlier in the day, something about an umbrella, but in her rush Marinette hadn't done more than wave brightly and yell a goodbye.

Tilting her head back, she closed her eyes. She let the fine mist settle on her face, piecing together a picture in her head of the delicate lace it wove across her skin. A small smile worked at the corners of her mouth as a droplet caught her in the corner of one eye and she opened them to wipe at the water.

Marinette sniffed, blinking rapidly against the growing pressure behind her eyes. It wasn't that it had been one of Chloé's worst weeks. Or even that it had been a *bad* couple of days.

It was just overwhelming. And no one second-guesses tears on someone's face in the rain.

Squeezing her eyes shut to force the moisture from her eyes, she drew a deep breath in. She blew it out sharply at the loss of the shifting water pattern on her skin. Opening her eyes to see black fabric and metal only caused her to frown and tilt her head.

“Hey.”

Her back straightened at the quiet word, shoulders tensing. Marinette lowered her head, catching a bit of blond hair in her peripheral.

Adrien. His name curled her lips into a sneer and Marinette quickly turned her face away from him. She ignored his sigh, hoping he’d just leave her alone.

“I just wanted you to know that I was only trying to take the gum off your seat.”

Marinette’s eyes narrowed into a hard glare. Pressing her lips together, she reminded herself of the time Chloé had pretended to apologize to get close enough to shear several chunks of hair off her head with safety scissors.

A small grunting noise left her mouth when she realized her head couldn’t turn any further away without also twisting her body into an indefensible position.

But the genuine *hurt* in his voice when he mumbled out, “I swear,” made her pause. Marinette turned back minutely, eyes narrowed.

He swallowed, and his jaw shifted. “I’ve never been to school before. I’ve never had friends. It’s all sort of new to me.”

Her eyebrows lifted and Marinette felt her shoulders relaxing from where she’d tensed them up near her ears. Confusion stirred in her chest.

Chloé isn’t a friend?

Marinette winced as the umbrella moved closer, but only moved a single step backwards before realizing he was *offering* it to her.

Rather than trying to put them both under the umbrella, he stood several steps away and allowed the rain to plaster his hair to his head. Marinette’s frown deepened at the sweet smile on his lips. He moved his hand holding the umbrella closer for her to take. Marinette’s hand shook as she reached for the handle.

His smile softened, making Marinette’s heart jump painfully. She stopped breathing entirely when their hands brushed before Adrien transferred the tool to her.

She was pretty sure lightning flashed behind him but she couldn’t hear the thunder over the sound of her own heart in her ears. So she wasn’t really surprised when she didn’t hear the snap of the umbrella before it came crashing down around her head.

Marinette closed her eyes in defeat. *This day just keeps getting better, doesn’t it?*

They snapped back open at the sound of Adrien laughing. Marinette peeked out from under the edge of the umbrella, one hand pulling the fabric upward. Her eyes widened and she could feel her face warming.

Did he plan this?

Her eyebrows pinched together as Marinette studied Adrien's face. He didn't sound like he was laughing at her, but maybe he was just good at hiding it.

“*His head tilted back before Adrien collapsed into a fit of full, deep laughs.*”

His head tilted back before Adrien collapsed into a fit of full, deep laughs. A smile crept up on her and it was only a moment before Marinette began to laugh along with him, a nervous giggle working up from her stomach and tingling through her limbs.

She watched him take a deep breath, steadying himself.

“See you tomorrow.” Adrien turned, taking a step down the stairs as Marinette tried to stammer a goodbye in return. Her eyes widened in panic.

He's going to think I'm an idiot! He's going to tell Chloé and Chloé is gonna tell Alya and I'm gonna lose my only friend because she's tired of rescuing me from Chloé all the time!

She needed to fix it, *immediately*.

“Hey!”

Adrien stopped, turning back over his shoulder. His eyebrows rose and Marinette's tongue stopped working again.

She swallowed hard, forcing the dry lump in her mouth down her throat. “Do you like pastries?”

One of his eyebrows lifted, a small frown forming. He opened his mouth to speak but Marinette was already plowing ahead.

“Because my parents own a bakery and if you're really serious that you were just trying to remove the gum I maybe owe you an apology for over-reacting.” Marinette cringed at how her words came out in a single breath but resisted the urge to run screeching in embarrassment. She made an effort to relax her fingers from where she'd tightened them around the handle of the umbrella.

Adrien's face went from confusion to wide-eyed excitement in the space of a second. He grinned widely, eyes scrunching up as his smile grew. Marinette tilted her head, watching his face light up. *Was he good at hiding things?*

"Really?"

Marinette fidgeted with the hem of her shirt with her free hand and looked away. "Yeah, I mean. I wasn't exactly nice to you."

He came back up the stairs, stopping one step below Marinette. She held the umbrella higher so he'd be out of the rain.

"I would love to come over. Let me tell my bodyguard where I'll be. How far is it?"

"Across the street, not even five minutes away."

"Perfect, be right back!"

Marinette watched as Adrien bounded to the sleek black car waiting on the curb for him. He waved his arms in small gestures while he spoke to the driver.

Grabbing her bag from the ground beside her, Marinette moved down the stairs at an easy pace and hoped it would give Adrien the time he needed to finish his request to the large man occupying the car.

A smile broke over her face when he turned and flashed a thumbs up before saying one more thing into the car window and running over.

As he approached, Adrien held a hand out for the umbrella. "Here, I'll take that and you hold onto my arm. That way we both stay dry."

Marinette pinched her lips together to stifle a laugh, but handed the umbrella over to him and shuffled closer to his side.

"I think it might be too late for that. You kinda look like a wet puppy."

Adrien snorted, grabbing her left hand and wrapping it around his bicep while he held the umbrella above both their heads. Marinette's heart slammed into her ribs, and she did her best to keep the smile on her face while it was attempting to escape.

"You okay?"

"Mmmhmmm!"

Adrien's eyebrows pinched together but he shrugged and tugged her arm as they began to walk. It took a moment for Marinette to remember that he didn't know where they were going, and she snapped her attention forward so she could guide them.

Marinette reached for the door handle when they arrived, but Adrien was faster and ushered her in before closing the umbrella and quietly following her inside. He looked around, eyes wide and mouth open. Shoving him forward a bit, Marinette waited for her mother to turn around at the counter and notice the two of them.

"Hello sweetheart, is this a new friend of yours?" Sabine beamed at Adrien, and Marinette enjoyed the flush that crept up his neck as he rubbed at it.

"This is Adrien, Maman. Adrien, this is my mother."

"Sabine is fine, dear." She reached over the counter, shaking Adrien's hand before waving around the shop. "Are you staying for *le goûter*, Adrien?"

Adrien nodded excitedly, his lower lip caught in his teeth. "Yes please, that would be wonderful."

Gathering a small assortment of items onto a tray, Marinette turned. "I'm planning to make some tea upstairs."

Sabine nodded, still smiling brightly down at Adrien. "Why don't you pick a couple of things as well. Marinette has good taste but she's not a fan of the almond *tartes* and they're delicious."

"Maman!" Marinette scrambled to collect her reasoning. "That's just because *frangipane* has that dry crumbly texture sometimes even when there's enough fat in the mixture and I don't like the risk!"

Pouting, she placed several more macarons on the tray, making sure to pick the fancier ones that they delivered to *Le Grand Paris* sometimes.

"I like to stick to the safe options." Her pout deepened in time with heat spreading across her face when Adrien began snickering. Her mother only pursed her lips tightly.

"Fine! I'll get him one of the almond ones!"

If she hadn't been holding a tray, she'd have thrown her hands into the air in mortification.

"Could I try a plain croissant first, please? I want to get a feel for the simple flavors you have before getting distracted by all the other wonderful things."

Sabine piled several croissants onto the tray, leaning forward and stage-whispering at Adrien. “Of course! You can tell a *lot* about a bakery based on how they treat their croissants.”

Marinette continued to grab pastries from the case, half-listening as her mother assured Adrien he would be welcome back whenever. She hurried him upstairs as quickly as possible and glared at her mother’s smirk once his back was turned.

Settling Adrien on the bar stool at the counter, Marinette busied herself with finding the tea service-ware and placing the kettle on a burner. She waved him off when he asked if she needed help. Resting the tin of tea next to the teapot, she ticked off steps in her head before replying.

“It’s okay, Adrien. It’s just that it’s a *gyokuro* and it’s so easy to scald the leaves so they turn out bitter and terrible so I’d rather just go ahead and do it myself.”

Marinette turned back to find the cups, hauling herself up onto the counter so she could pull them from the back of the shelf while muttering under her breath. Why anyone in her house would put them all the way at the back of the cupboard was beyond her.

“Adrien nodded excitedly, his lower lip caught in his teeth.”

“Got them!” Dropping back down, Marinette set the cups down to see Adrien pouring water into the pot. She hesitated, raising both eyebrows at him.

Adrien looked up, flinched, and set the kettle back down before rubbing at the back of his neck.

“Sorry. It’s just, um. It was taking you long enough to find the cups that the water was going to be boiling when you got back to it. You were so concerned about it scalding that I didn’t want that to happen just because you couldn’t reach the mugs.”

She blinked. “Oh. Thank you. That’s very helpful.”

Adrien raised his head, smiling across the counter like a sunbeam at the compliment.

While the tea steeped, Marinette tapped her foot impatiently on the ground. She only realized she was drumming on her bag as well when Tikki kicked the side of it in retaliation. Taking several gulps of air, she tried to settle her nerves long enough to pour tea without spilling it.

She was still shaking when she set the full mugs of tea in front of Adrien and settled onto the chair beside him.

“Do I make you that uncomfortable?”

Marinette jumped at the subdued query, spilling tea on her hands and hissing at the sting. She waved her hands in the air, causing Adrien to move his head further back out of reach.

Groaning, she wrapped her hands around the mug of tea in front of her and willed them to be less fidgety.

“Do I make you that uncomfortable?”

“No, Adrien. You don’t make me uncomfortable, I’m just awkward and clumsy. I’m sorry.” Marinette lied easily, figuring it would be harder to get on his good side if he assumed she disliked him.

She sipped at the tea, closing her eyes in the hopes that she wouldn’t have to make eye contact with him for a minute or two.

She listened to the sound of the kitchen buzzing; the fridge humming, the gas in the stove, and the sound of the teapot as it cooled and clicked with the temperature change. Marinette opened her eyes when she heard Adrien lift his mug to his lips for a cautious sip of his own tea. She smiled at the happy little hum he let out and it twisted into a wry grin when he turned to look at her.

“Lots of people are awkward. I’m awkward making friends but you’re being so kind to me.” He met her eyes.

Marinette smiled into her tea, blowing out a shuddery breath and feeling her fingers tingle against the cup. *Either he’s an amazing liar or he’s actually nothing like Chloé.*

Swallowing a scalding sip, she stammered out a garbled sentence and waved one hand at the plate full of pastries.

She figured if Adrien took one, *she* could take one, and if she took one she could *jam it directly into her mouth* and not have to speak anymore.

Blessedly, he seemed to understand her.

Marinette waited for a minute for him to choose one of the croissants, but hadn’t decided what she wanted first when she looked over to see the entire front of Adrien’s shirt covered in small, flaky pastry pieces and a stunned look on his face.

She couldn’t have kept herself from laughing at the scene if she’d tried. Slumping over the counter, she cackled at his wide eyes and slack jaw, the hand under the croissant doing absolutely nothing to stop the cascade of crumbs.

A muffled, “Wow, these are *really* flaky,” only set her off again and it wasn’t long before Adrien had shoved the rest of the croissant into his mouth so he could chuckle along.

“Try a macaron instead. Maybe you’ll make less of a mess.” Marinette wrinkled her nose, grinning at Adrien’s vain attempts to clean the pastry from his clothing.

“Ha ha, very funny.”

Her smile grew wider when he proved unable to keep a straight face. They stared at each other, both biting their lips so they didn’t set the other off again before simultaneously collapsing into another laughing fit.

The way Adrien looked at her when the giggles finally subsided had more to do with Marinette’s breathlessness than the giggling.

It was enough to fan the tiny spark of hope that Adrien might not be another spoiled rich brat after all.

Taking another sip to cover her face, Marinette reached for a macaron. Adrien watched which one she chose and selected the same raspberry flavor, brightening when a bite revealed tart passionfruit curd inside.

As they worked through the plate of treats, Adrien asked polite questions about Marinette’s time in school and things she enjoyed the most. In return she asked what he did with his time at home and before long she had him babbling about his favorite videogames and movies.

She was quiet more often than not, hedging her responses, but her shoulders slowly settled and nerves softened as Adrien’s enthusiasm for the subject grew.

Marinette lost track of how long they spent talking once they found a common interest in playing UMS, but learning how *ridiculously nerdy* his user name was strengthened her new resolve that Chloé might shut up more often in class. She’d have to, lest she mock Adrien’s interests. His presence would be a shield, and he could even prove to be an ally for her eventually.

Halfway through a discussion about which mech had a more powerful combo, Adrien managed to smack himself in the face with an over-excited hand gesture. He looked so affronted that Marinette’s giggles quickly grew out of control. Doubling over and clutching her stomach proved to be a poor decision when she promptly fell off the stool.

Adrien dove off his own chair in an attempt to catch her, but only managed to tangle the two of them in a snickering heap on the floor. Adrien was first to catch his breath, dimples in his cheeks from the wide smile across his face.

He stood, holding out one hand to help Marinette stand back up. Brushing her legs off and rolling her shoulders, Marinette looked up at Adrien standing in front of her with pinched brows and a slight frown. He swallowed before meeting her eyes.

“Thank you.”

“Anytime, like Maman said, you’re always welcome here.” Marinette reached out and refilled both their cups, shaking the pot to see if she’d gotten the last of it. Adrien’s head turned to follow.

“No, I mean- Thank you for not assuming I was a bully. After I explained at least.”

Marinette swallowed, setting the teapot back on the counter.

Adrien lifted his eyes from the counter to meet hers. “It means more to me than you know.”

“It means a lot to me too.” Marinette sucked a breath in. “I don’t have a lot of close friends and you could have written me off as weird or mean. You didn’t.”

She looked away, grabbing her mug. “I guess I should thank you for coming back to explain.”

Adrien beamed at her and took a small sip.

“I suppose we both get a second chance then.”

“Yeah. I guess so.” Marinette grinned back, raising her cup in an impromptu toast. “Friends?”

Adrien reached out, tapping his own mug against hers. “Friends.”

THE END





Story Prompt Challenge

Looking for inspiration? Try these prompts and tag [@adriennettezine](#) on Tumblr.

Marinette's parents died in a car crash. Her mother's brother comes to take care of Marinette. She gets into photography and wants to be the best photographer in Paris.

Adrien is a model with a strict schedule. On one of his days off, he met Marinette and became friends with her. He let her take a photo of him. Of course, Marinette makes sure she has his permission in writing and has it notarized.

Adrien's photos are in her private collection. One day she comes home to find all everything gone, even her photo collection. In a panic, she rushed to Adrien to let him know what happened. Not long after the photos she took of Adrien surfaces, his father decides to step in on the situation.

Not Just Another Rainy Day

by: WyomingParmesan

When Ladybug and Chat Noir are caught fighting an akuma in the middle of a rainstorm, they must seek shelter immediately or risk being soaked in their civilian forms. Adrien isn't so lucky and ends up taking refuge in a familiar place, while Marinette gets an unexpected guest.

Thunder roared across the Parisian sky as a storm raged across the city. Everyone who had the misfortune of being outside at the time was then left in a soaking mess.

Unfortunately for Ladybug and Chat Noir, Hawk Moth had no cares about the weather. The supervillain they were currently fighting has the ability to reflect water off of their clothing, making it very slippery to be near them.

Ladybug's lucky charm had left the villain in a slurry of mud, making her unable to attack.

"Chat," she yelled from across the street. "I think the akuma might be in her jacket." She pointed to how the water was going everywhere else except for her clothing.

"Got it," he said. "Cataclysm!" He raised his hand as his power surged into it. He took off running towards the villain, who was trying her best to attack but to no avail.

His hand touched her jacket, causing it to turn to dust and release the akuma. "Your turn, Milady!"

As he reconciled the akuma victim, Ladybug ran across the street and threw her yo-yo up in the air. The black butterfly flew right into it. "Gotcha!", she said. She opened her yo-yo and a white butterfly flew out of it. "Bye bye little butterfly!"

She ran to Chat Noir's side and knelt down next to him. The victim turned out to be a little girl who simply hated getting wet. "You'll be okay, I promise," Ladybug told her, causing the girl to smile. She stood back up and threw her lucky charm in the air. "Miraculous Ladybug!"

Swarms of her ladybugs flew around fixing up all the damage the villain had caused. Even once it was fixed, though, the rain still kept coming.

"I guess that wasn't her doing," Chat said, watching as the little girl ran off to be with her parents. He looked down at his suit, which deflected the rain pretty well. His hair wasn't as lucky, though.

"No, it was already raining even before she appeared," Ladybug said. Her earrings beeped along with his ring. "Better get out of here quick or else we'll get soaked as civilians." She held out her fist.

He bumped it with his knuckles. "Pound it!", they said at the same time. "Yeah, guess it's time for this cat to skedaddle. Until next time, Milady." He bowed to her before using his stick to launch himself elsewhere.

With Chat out of sight, she places her eyes on the nearby bakery, to which she lived. As her earrings kept beeping, she took out her yo-yo and flung herself a few blocks away and up onto her balcony.

“Swarms of her ladybugs flew around fixing up all the damage the villain had caused.”

She transformed back into Marinette as soon as she landed in her bed. Tikki flew out of her earrings and landed on one of the pillows. Her body shook as she shivered. "Oh, you poor thing," Marinette said, picking up the kwami in her hands. She didn't hesitate to pull down her blanket, placing Tikki gently onto her sheets. "That should keep you nice and warm." She pulled the covers up over her kwami and left her a cookie to munch on later before heading down her ladder.

Even though her clothes were mostly safe from the pouring rain, her hair wasn't as lucky. Her parents were busy in the bakery, so it had been fairly easy to slip out and back in without them even suspecting a thing. She opened the latch to her door and slipped down to the bathroom to grab a towel. Standing in front of the mirror, she wrapped her hair into a tight towel bun before heading back up into her room.

“I hope Chat Noir made it back fine,” she said to herself as she latched her door back up. She looked to the window to see that the storm was still raging. “Hopefully, he didn’t get too wet.”



“Come on, come on,” Chat Noir said as he ran towards his home. Unluckily for him, the fight had been far away from his home and he didn’t have enough time to even use his stick to get there. His ring beeped once more to let him know that his transformation would soon be over. His last resort was to slip down into a nearby alleyway. The aura of green light flashed as he turned back into Adrien, who was now very much soaked by the rainstorm.

“Ahhh!”, Plagg yelled as he flew out of the ring. “You mean to tell me that you couldn’t have waited until we got to your house.”

“Sorry Plagg,” Adrien said, wiping rain from his eyes. “Come on, let’s try to get out of here before we get too soaked.” He opened his shirt for the kwami to fly inside, both to stay warm and to find cheese.

Adrien stepped out of the alleyway to try and get a better look of his surroundings. His eyes widened as he spotted a familiar bakery. He knew that his house wasn’t too far from Marinette’s so he made a run for it. His feet pounded on the pavement as he somehow managed to miss every single mud puddle in the street. Stopping for a moment to catch his breath, he heard a familiar voice calling him.

“Adrien!”

He looked to his right to see Sabine sticking her head out of the door of the bakery. She was holding out an arm, waving for him to come over. “Adrien, come on, you’re soaked.”

Adrien looked down at himself. His orange shoes now sported a coating of brown from the mud and his clothes clung to him from the wetness of the rain. Brushing some wet locks of hair from his face, he ran over to her. “It’s okay, Mrs. Dupain-Cheng,” he said, “I think I can make it.”

She shook her head at him. “Nonsense,” she said, “You’ll get sick out here.” Sensing his reluctance, she gave him a warm smile, one that he returned as well.

“Okay,” he said, stepping inside as she closed the door behind him. The bakery was full of more customers, meaning she didn’t have much time to talk. “Thank you.”

“You’re very welcome, sweetheart,” Sabine said as she ran back behind the counter. “You can head on up to Marinette’s room if you like. I’m sure she’s got some dry clothes for you up there.”

He nodded at her and headed on up the stairs. Passing on through the living room, he stepped onto the stairs that led to Marinette’s room.

“You could’ve at least grabbed me something to eat down there,” Plagg said as he popped out of Adrien’s shirt.

“Shhh, she might hear you,” Adrien pushed the kwami back into his pocket. “I’ll just ask Marinette if she has any snacks.”

A muffled “fine” came from inside his shirt.



Marinette looked through the rack of clothes in front of her. Her wet hair still leaked through her towel, leaving a trail of water on her back. Her hands grazed a pink long sleeve and she pulled it off of the rack.

“Heh, I still haven’t worn this one yet,” she held the sweater in front of her, running her hands across the soft material. On the front of it was a white kitty face. Going over to the dresser behind her, she opened a drawer and pulled out some white leggings. They were adorned with her signature pink polka dots.

Once she had her clothes in hand, she sat them on her chaise and threw her jacket off into the floor. Before she could slip her shirt off, though, there was a knock at her door.

“Come in!”, she yelled as she sat down on her chaise. She expected to see the face of one of her parents, probably asking her to come help out in the bakery. Instead, though, she was caught off guard by locks of blond hair. It took all of her strength to not fall backwards into the floor.

Adrien stuck his head in, smiling when he noticed her. “Uh, hi Marinette,” he said, climbing up into her room. “Sorry, I know this was a bit of a surprise.

“A bit? I almost had a heart attack!”, is what she wanted to say. Instead though, she took a deep breath before calmly saying, “A-Adrien? What are you doing here?”

He latched the door behind him. “I kinda got caught up in the storm and your mom let me come in,” he explained. “She said that you might have some dry clothes for me.”

Marinette looked him up and down. His blond hair was stuck to his face as his skin shined from the wetness. His white jacket and black shirt looked so heavy from being stuck to his skin.

She felt her face heating up as her eyes made contact with the outline of his abs. “Oh yes, right,” she stood up from the chaise, walking back over to her clothing rack. “This is all of the stuff I’ve been working on and have yet to try out.” She went back to her chaise and held up the pink sweater. “See this one? I was just going to try it on myself, actually.”

Adrien examined the sweater, smiling at the cute design. “You made that yourself?”, she nodded. “It’s so cute and I think you’ll look great in it.”

If her face wasn’t on fire before, it sure was now. An awkward smile graced her lips. “Heh, t-thank you,” Marinette cleared her throat and laid the sweater back down in her chaise. “I-I was thinking that you could um, model one of my outfits. That is, if you want to, but I know with you being a model and all that maybe you’d...want to?”

“*Marinette looked him up and down. His blond hair was stuck to his face as his skin shined from the wetness.*”

Adrien laughed. “Of course! Your stuff is awesome and I’d be happy to wear anything you give me,” he walked over to the clothing rack. “How about you get changed and I’ll look through these, okay?”

Nodding, she grabbed her clothes and went behind the screen she had set up on the other side of the room. As Marinette got changed, Adrien took it upon himself to look at some of her latest clothing designs. Granted, most of them were a bit too feminine for his taste, but he internally applauded her workmanship.

His eyes landed on a mint green sweater, very similar to the pink one Marinette had chosen for herself. It was also adorned with a kitty face, this time in black. Grabbing it off the rack, he held it out in front of him just as she walked out from behind the screen.

“How do I look?”, she pulled her hair out of the towel, letting it flow in the heat blowing around the room. Her hair had gotten a bit longer since the last time he had seen it out of its signature pigtails, going just below her shoulders.

Adrien could’ve sworn he felt his face getting hot, but he thought it may have been from the heat. “You look great,” he said, smiling from ear to ear. He then held up the sweater he had chosen. “Hey look, we can match.”

“Oh! I forgot I made two versions of this one,” she gestured to her own sweater. “I think you could pull it off.”

“What do you suggest I wear with it, Miss Fashion Designer?”, he smirked a little as he spoke.

“Adrien could’ve sworn he felt his face getting hot, but he thought it may have been from the heat.”

“Hmm,” she walked over to the rack, flipping through the various articles of clothing. “I haven’t really designed many bottoms, mostly because pants take a bit more time.” Her hair continued to drip down her back as she moved back and forth. “Oh! You’re in luck.”

He watched as she held out a pair of black jeans. “Great thinking!”, he said. “Those will look great with this.”

She handed him the pair of jeans and he headed behind the screen. “I think so too,” she said, her blush fading away a bit. At that moment, it was her turn to internally scream.

Adrien showing up to her door was not only a surprise, but now he wanted to wear her clothes?! As if wearing her derby hat wasn’t already a huge deal. Her heart pounded in anticipation as she watched his silhouette moving around behind the screen.

He pulled off his wet clothes and they landed with a loud smack on the hard floor. It was then that he realized that there was one small thing he needed to take care of. “Hey uh, Marinette?”, he called out from behind the screen.

She perked up. “Y-Yes?”, she resisted the urge to peer behind the screen.

“Can I have a towel? My hair is still soaked and I’d hate to ruin your clothes,” he stuck his head out from behind the screen.

The redness returned to her face. He had stuck himself out far enough that she could just see the top of his pecs. “Oh yes, hang on just a second,” she opened the latch to her door and ran back down to the bathroom.

Once the door slammed shut, Plagg came out and sat atop Adrien’s head. “Ooh, you’re naked in a girl’s room,” he taunted.

Adrien felt his face burn. “Plagg! Marinette could hear you!”, he instinctively covered his chest with his hands. “And I am not naked, thank you.”

“Close enough,” the kwami stuffed a piece of camembert in his cheeks. “Now I shall skedaddle before she comes back.” He flew back into Adrien’s shirt, which was now on the floor.

Save for perfect timing, Marinette opened the latch and rushed over to give him a towel. “Here, sorry about that.”

“No, no, it’s fine,” he took the towel from her and went back behind the screen. “I just hope it wasn’t too much trouble.” He moved the towel back and forth rapidly on his head, causing it to puff up a bit.

“You’re never too much trouble, Adrien,” Marinette internally smacked herself for letting that slip. “Er, I mean, I’m happy to help.”

Adrien laughed a little. Her shyness was always something he liked about her. It was both cute and a bit awkward, but in a good way. “Thank you, Marinette,” he threw the towel down and began slipping the sweater over his head.

“You’re very welcome,” she said, standing up on her toes. Looking to her left, she noticed her vanity and all the various fixings it had sitting on it. Tapping her lips with a finger, an idea came to her mind.

Once he had slipped on the matching pants, Adrien stepped out into her room. “How do I look?”

She turned back to him and was blessed with a beautiful sight. There stood Adrien wearing a mint green kitty face sweater, complete with black jeans. Her heart skipped a beat as her eyes moved up to his face. His lips sported a bright smile and his hair had that “fresh out of the shower” look.

“Y-You look...handorable, I mean adorsome,” she shook her head as she tried to pull herself together. “Adorably handsome.”

The blush on his cheeks deepened as he looked away and pulled at his sleeves. “Thank you for the compliment,” he said, his eyes twinkling.

Marinette lost her concentration for a moment there as she let herself get lost in his eyes. She looked him up and down, taking notice of how her clothing matched his form so perfectly.

“So um, what’s that for?”, he pointed at her vanity over against the wall. She was broken from her thoughts as she followed his finger.

“Oh! Yes, right,” she gestured for him to come over as she walked over to her setup. “Well, I know with you being a model and all that you are probably used to having people fix your hair.”

He nodded. “You would be correct,” he lifted a brow. “I’m guessing you wanna be my hairstylist for today?”

“Y-Yes,” she put her hands behind her back. “That is, if you’ll let me.”

Adrien didn’t hesitate to sit down in front of her mirror. “Show me whatcha got,” he said as he closed his eyes.

Her first instinct was to grab a comb and go over his mop of hair. Luckily for her, it was well kept and so she didn’t have to maneuver around any tangles.

He leaned his head back in satisfaction as she moved the comb throughout his scalp. Despite having his hair played with on the daily, he always found the sensation of comb or fingers running through his hair to be very relaxing.

Once she combed it to how she wanted it, she took some gel and slathered it on her palms. “Alright, let me know if I pull on you too much,” she began putting the gel in his hair.

“Will do, but I don’t think there’ll be any issue,” he opened his eyes to look at her in the mirror. “I trust you.”

She smiled at him through the mirror, hoping that he wouldn’t notice her blush. “Thanks,” she said. “How so you like it so far?”

He examined his hair. It was out of its usual shape, as Marinette had used her fingers to curl it in the back. The front was sticking up a bit, making it look similar

to his usual messy look. “Wow, I love it,” he twirled a lock of hair with his fingers. “I should talk to my dad about hiring you on my hair and makeup team.”

They laughed. “That would be really cool, but I don’t think I’m ready for that just yet,” she said. “You can get up now too.”

He pushed the chair back and stood up. While he examined himself in the mirror, Marinette found herself still admiring him. Mint green was such a good color on him. It matched his beautiful green eyes and highlighted his luscious blond hair.

“You really did such a wonderful job, Marinette,” Adrien walked towards her. Their eyes met as he leaned his head down a little.

This time it was her entire body that heated up as he grabbed her hands. She could feel her heart pounding in her chest and she was sure his was doing the same. A gentle smile reached his face as he leaned down and placed a kiss onto her flaming hot cheek.

“

While he examined himself in the mirror, Marinette found herself still admiring him.

”

“Thank you for being such an amazing friend,” he whispered in her ear.

Her hand flew to her cheek, feeling the burning sensation on her skin. She smiled back when she saw his face flaming as well. “You’re very welcome, Adrien,” she stood up on her toes and returned his gesture by also giving him a kiss on the cheek.

He mimicked her by placing his own hand on his cheek.

For a moment, all was quiet as the teens stood and admired each other. Their matching outfits really helped, too.

The silence was broken by the sound of Adrien’s phone ringing. Shaking his head back into reality, he pulled it from his pocket. “Oh shoot,” he said. “It’s Nathalie. My father is wondering where I am, I-I gotta go.”

“It’s okay, I understand,” Marinette said. “Besides, the storm sounds like it’s over now.”

“You’re the best,” he said before running to her door. “Welp, gotta go or else I’ll never be able to do something like this again. See ya tomorrow at school.”

She waved as he started climbing down the stairs. “See ya!”, once she heard the door to her room lock, she ran over and climbed up the stairs as fast as she could.

With a large thud, she flopped down on her bed. Her loud sighing and squealing rustled the sleeping kwami, who came out from under the covers with a yawn.

“I see someone had a good day,” Tikki said, still waking up.

“Tikki, have I ever mentioned how amazing Adrien is?”, Marinette closed her eyes as she put a hand to her heart.

“Only fifty times a day,” Tikki put her paws on her hips.

Marinette laughed along with her as they laid down together in her bed.

Deep inside of her, she hoped that maybe, just maybe, he thought she was amazing too.

THE END



Staying Cozy · Alwaysinstoryland

Rejected Heroes Club

by: Purrincess-Chat

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After being exposed by Miracle Queen, Marinette's allies are feeling down about losing their super powers.

To ward off suspicion, Marinette and Adrien reveal their temporary identities as Multimouse and Aspid, and together they all form the Rejected Heroes Club.

With her identity safe, Marinette relaxes until Alya pairs her with the boy of her dreams — Adrien.

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Chapter 1
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“Marinette, are you a superhero?”

Alya's question hit her like a brick wall the moment she entered the classroom, and Marinette would know - she'd run into several brick walls in her life.

“Am I a what?” She asked, and her pulse quickened.

Had she exposed her own identity? Had she messed up again? Would she have to go into hiding or pass the Miracle Box onto Chat Noir and lose all of her memories and move to China to live her days working in a rice pasture and never see her friends ever again and unknowingly live out the rest of her life as a colossal failure and the worst Ladybug in the history of Ladybugs?

“I'm kidding,” Alya chuckled then gestured over her shoulder to where Nino, Kim, and Max stood. “We've all been talking, and now that our identities are exposed because of little miss Miracle Queen, we're realizing that Ladybug picked several

people from our class to be heroes. I know you could never tell even if you did, but we're just wondering who else in the class could have a secret identity since we're all kinda bummed about being outed."

"Oh," Marinette said, relaxing her shoulders.

"It's kind of crazy that Ladybug picked so many of us," Nino said, leaning back in his seat.

"Well, if you consider the number of times that Ladybug and Chat Noir have interacted with our class or saved us from being akumatized, it isn't entirely out of the realm of possibility. She and Chat Noir have become quite familiar with all of us," Max said matter-of-factly.

"What do you think it means?" Alya said, that impish reporter's grin Marinette knew all too well curling on her lips. "I have a couple theories that Ladybug is actually a student at our school, constantly on the lookout for potential allies, and it would make sense since she chose all of us. Maybe she's even in our class."

Marinette's stomach jumped up to her throat.

"Whoa, wouldn't it be awesome if Ladybug were walking among us? Maybe she's even listening to us right now," Kim said, glancing around as if he expected Ladybug to be hiding in any crevice, which, given the present conversation, Marinette wouldn't have minded.

"What are we talking about?" Marinette jumped at Adrien's voice over her shoulder, her heart fluttering when she turned to him.

"Just about how weird it is that Ladybug picked so many of us from the same class to be heroes," Nino replied.

"I think it's a little suspicious," Alya said.

"What if Ladybug *and* Chat Noir were our classmates? Wouldn't that be so awesome?" Kim said, and Marinette chewed her cheek.

Now, more than ever, it was important that she protect her identity. She'd seen first-hand the dangers that came with people knowing who she really was, and she needed to kick dirt over her trail before these speculations got out of control.

"Yes," she said, and everyone turned to her. "I was a hero, too."

"Wait, for real?" Alya's eyes narrowed.

“Uh, yeah, but I was only ever allowed on one mission. Back when Mme. Mendeleiev was akumatized after she went on that show, remember?” Marinette said.

“Alternative Truth! Where everything isn’t always true, but nothing is really false!” Kim exclaimed, crossing his arms into an x.

“Right, that one,” Marinette said. “I became Multimouse. Unfortunately, I’m so clumsy and scatterbrained that I gave Ladybug my Miraculous back in front of Chat Noir, so she told me I could never be a hero again.”

“If you were a hero, why didn’t Miracle Queen’s wasps summon you?” Alya asked, and Marinette shrank under her gaze.

“Uhh, because Chloe doesn’t like me?” She shrugged, and after a moment of contemplation, Alya conceded.

“Fair enough,” she said, and Marinette breathed a sigh of relief. “But that does make five students from our class who have been picked.”

“Uh, make that six. I was also a temporary hero once,” Adrien said, and Marinette smiled up at him, remembering the day fondly. She only wished things had worked out, but it was probably for the best that they didn’t. If Adrien were on missions with her, she’d definitely be too distracted.

“What? Dude, no way!” Nino said, extending a fist to bump.

“Yeah, I was Aspidochelone—the first person to wield the Snake Miraculous—but things didn’t exactly work out, so I let Ladybug pass it on to Luka. I probably didn’t get summoned by Miracle Queen because Luka took over my job,” he said, rubbing the back of his neck.

“Okay, this definitely adds a lot of evidence to my case,” Alya said, that determined glint whenever she found a new scoop to chase in her eye, but just as quickly as it came, it dimmed. “It’s kind of a major bummer that we all got exposed though. Now that Hawkmoth knows our identities, we’ll never get to be heroes again.”

“Yeah...”

Her friends deflated, and Marinette curled her shoulders. She hated seeing them all look so defeated. Everything really had been flipped on its head. She’d lost her

mentor, her allies, and on top of that, she had way more responsibility now as guardian. It was true that this group couldn't get their Miraculouses back, but that didn't mean they had to stop being heroes.

"Hey, I've got an idea," Marinette said. "Since none of us can be superheroes anymore, what if we start a club for doing good deeds as civilians? We can play the role of our superhero alter egos, but instead of fighting villains, we can volunteer at the library or pick up trash. Kind of like...a rejected heroes club."

"Great idea, Marinette," Adrien said, and her cheeks warmed.

"You could make us all costumes just like the ones we had when we were heroes," Nino said.

"Yes! I wanna see how high I can jump as Roi Singe," Kim said, stretching his legs.

"Kim, you won't have actual superpowers. It will just be a costume," Max said with an eye roll.

"We can all even pair off into teams like Ladybug and Chat Noir. Each team can be responsible for different areas of town," Alya said, casting a sly grin in Marinette's direction. "Nino and I can be a team, obviously, and I'm pretty sure Kim is going to need Max to keep him under control, so that leaves you two one-hit wonders to be a team."

“Yeah, I was *Aspik*—the first person to wield the Snake Miraculous—but things didn't exactly work out...”

Marinette's spine stiffened as Adrien turned to her. Of course Alya would pair her with Adrien! She was only the most amazing best friend in the whole world. Marinette wasn't sure if she loved her or hated her—she was too busy trying not to faint.

"Awesome! I love teaming up with Marinette," Adrien said, nudging her with his elbow.

"Great! Then it's settled. The Rejected Heroes Club starts today," Alya said, and Marinette took a deep breath.

What had she just gotten herself into?

Chapter 2

A breath passed Marinette's lips as the last picture from her wall landed in a bright pink box. She trailed her fingers along the rim, staring down at the pile of photos smiling back at her. Adrien was coming over to be measured for his hero costume, and even though he knew she kept them up, something about having him around all of them made her nervous.

She closed the lid on the box and moved it to the chest beside her chaise-lounge, stacking it neatly atop several others just like it, and found herself reaching for the Miracle Box. It felt different. Foreign. Wrong. Wayzz and Tikki assured her that Master Fu had always intended to make her the next guardian, but she never imagined the price that came with it.

"Marinette! You have a visitor," her mom called up the stairs, and Marinette tucked the box back into its hiding place and shut the lid.

Her allies might have been taken from her, but she could still be a guardian to them through this club. She could still give them hope. After everything that happened, she was in need of some herself.

Grabbing her sketchbook and a tape measure, she braced herself as the wooden stairs creaked until blond hair popped through her trapdoor. His face lit up when he saw her, and she willed her heart into slowing its pace to no avail.

"Doesn't your dad have your measurements already? Couldn't you have just sent them to me?" She asked, and Adrien averted his gaze with a smirk.

"Well, yeah, but this gives me an excuse to get out of the house for a bit," he said, rubbing the back of his neck. "Besides, I wanted to hang with my new partner for a while."

She didn't even try to stop the butterflies in her stomach that time. Why did he have to be so perfect?

“I guess I can show you what I designed for you,” she said. “I’ve never seen your costume before, so I drew up a few designs. If you don’t like any of them, we could try to work up one that’s close to what your actual costume looked like.”

Adrien looked over her shoulder, standing closer than necessary as she flipped through the pages. His arm brushed hers as he moved to get a better look, green eyes devouring every pencil stroke. Marinette did her best to keep her breaths even, resisting the urge to reach out and trail her fingers through his silky hair.

“These look awesome! They’re way cooler than what I had. Now I kinda feel lame,” he said, rubbing the back of his neck.

“No, no! I’m sure your costume was cute. I mean- I’m sure it was fine,” she said, and he trained those gorgeous eyes on her.

“Thanks,” he said. He sat on her chaise, his countenance deflating. “My costume was probably the only good thing about my time as a hero. I wasn’t exactly successful, so Ladybug ended up picking Luka instead. I feel like I really let her down.”

“*Adrien looked over her shoulder, standing closer than necessary as she flipped through the pages.*”

“I’m sure Ladybug appreciated your help. She wouldn’t have picked you if she didn’t believe in you.” Marinette sat beside him.

“I guess. I feel like such a failure,” he sighed. “I don’t even deserve to be in this club.”

“No, no!” She waved her hands frantically. “I-I think you do. Maybe this can be your second chance to show the world that you can be a hero too.”

His face softened at that, “Thanks, Marinette. I guess I just really want to do a good job.”

“That already makes you a hero, Adrien.” She placed a reassuring hand on his shoulder. “Having superpowers and a mask aren’t what makes someone a hero. Doing the right thing and trying your hardest to help are, and I’m sure Ladybug understands that.”

“Yeah, you’re right,” he said, shifting his gaze to his feet. “I know you’d probably rather have Luka as your partner, but I hope you’ll settle for me.”

“No! I’m happy that you and I were paired up. Now we can spend more time together,” Marinette said then quickly added, “-helping others! I mean. We can spend time together helping others.”

“Thanks, Marinette,” he said, pulling her in for a hug. “I’m glad we’re friends, and I think Alya was right to pair us up. I really needed to hear that.”

“No biggie,” Marinette said, cheeks hot. “Now, about those measurements.”



“The costumes you made turned out really awesome, Marinette,” Adrien said, examining the detail work on his new suit a few days later as his bodyguard drove them home. “Those kids at the library really thought we were superheroes.”

As cute as Aspik’s original suit was, Marinette wasn’t technically supposed to know what it looked like, and once she started designing new versions, she couldn’t stop. Adrien was just too handsome for words, and her brain was running wild with possibilities. Should she use this time to try to get closer to him? What if he didn’t like her? Why did he look so gorgeous in a green mask?

“I’m glad you like it. I was nervous when I designed them because I’ve never seen your suit, but I think it turned out okay,” she said, trailing her fingers along the stitching in the shoulders as an excuse to touch him.

“You’re really talented, Marinette, or should I say, Multimouse?” He said with a wink. “By the way, you look really cute with your hair up. You should wear it like that more often.”

“Y-You think?”

“Of course. I think it’s pretty.”

“Not as pretty as you,” she said with a dreamy sigh before snapping herself back down to earth. “I mean, uh, you’re so handsome- I’m just me, and you’re you, and-”

Adrien chuckled at her blundering, seemingly unbothered by the sentiment. The fact that he'd gotten used to her stammering should have been incredibly embarrassing, but somehow it gave her comfort.

"This club was a really good idea. Having heroes to look up to meant a lot to those kids we read to today," Adrien said. "And I think it means a lot to Alya and the others too."

"Well, after their identities were exposed, they all seemed so sad, and I was hoping that they'd realize that just because they'll never get their Miraculouses back, that doesn't mean they aren't still heroes," Marinette said.

"You did all this just so your friends wouldn't be sad?" Adrien asked, tilting his head to the side then shaking it. "You really care about everyone. If any of us deserves to be a hero, it's you."

"I-I dunno, I just want to help my friends, that's all. I'm no Ladybug," she said, waving it away.

"I think you could be Ladybug," he said, and Marinette held her breath. "I mean Ladybug is smart and kind and always thinking of others. You two are a lot alike—always trying to solve everyone's problems. I know I've said it before, but you really are our everyday Ladybug."

Marinette relaxed, a smile curling on her lips. "I just always lookout for my friends and the people important to me, and if I can do anything for them, I try my best," she said with a shrug. "If I can be a hero for them then...that's enough for me."

Adrien's bodyguard slowed to a stop in front of the bakery, and Marinette reached for the door.

"Today was really fun. I think Aspid and Multimouse make a pretty good team," she said, holding out her fist.

"Definitely," Adrien agreed, touching his fist to hers.

"See you tomorrow at school," she said, and Adrien nodded.

"Yeah, see you tomorrow..."

.....
Chapter 3
.....

“Heads up!”

Adrien turned as Marinette tossed a bottle toward the trash bin he was carrying, backing up a few paces to catch it. A cool breeze blew along the Seine, puffy clouds floating across a blue sky. The perfect weather for picking up trash with a friend.

“I believe that’s 8 points for me now,” Marinette said with a triumphant beam for passing his score.

“No fair, this was my idea. Now you’re making me look bad,” he chuckled, stooping to pick up an empty soda can. “Go long.”

Marinette jogged backwards as the can arced overhead, nearly stumbling as she caught it in her bin. Their laughter echoed between the walls of the channel as Adrien threw his arms up.

“And now we’re tied again,” Marinette said, but Adrien placed his hands on his hips.

“What? That shot was worth at least 3 points,” he said with a huff.

“No way! I’ve made some just as good as that one,” she shot back, squaring her shoulders under his playful glare.

“Ice cream! Get your ice cream!” Andre called from the bridge above them, and Adrien smirked.

“Fine, maybe not three points, but how about two points and some ice cream?” He offered.

“Deal.”

Dumping their bins in nearby trash cans, the two climbed the steps to meet the gathering crowd around Andre’s ice cream stall. Couples took turns receiving their personalized concoctions, tailored to be the perfect blend for their love as Andre was known for, but when Adrien and Marinette made it to the front, he gave them a knowing smile.

“Ah, Marinette and Adrien! Such fun clothes for two good friends, I will have to form blends to match,” he said.

“We’re doing some volunteer work cleaning up trash for a school club,” Marinette explained while he prepared their cones.

“You two look just like superheroes,” Andre remarked.

“That’s the idea,” Adrien said then, casting Marinette a sly grin, added, “If you ask me, she’s way more heroic than I am.”

“Stop,” Marinette laughed, shoving his shoulder.

“Well, a pair of superhero partners need super blends. For the heroine I have black sesame with a scoop of strawberry, and for her daring hero, I have green tea and lemon.”

“Thanks, Andre.” They waved before retreating to a bench along the Seine, and Adrien’s phone buzzed in his pocket. Only fifteen minutes before his Chinese lesson.

“We made some good progress,” Adrien said, ignoring the timer counting down in his head.

“Yeah, I think cleaning up the entire Seine was a bit ambitious for one afternoon, but this area looks nicer,” Marinette agreed with a yawn.

She was always tired lately, and Adrien trailed his gloved fingers along the intricate stitching on his thigh. All of their costumes must have taken a lot of time, but she managed to make them all within a week. How often did Marinette stay up all night in the pursuit of helping someone else?

“Can I ask you something?” Adrien said, and Marinette tilted her head to one side, licking ice cream from her tiny spoon. “About what you said the other day...How do you find time to help so many people?”

She contemplated it a while, tapping her lip with the spoon as they stared across the murky water. “I dunno. I just...do. People count on me, so I always try my best to help.”

“Doesn’t it get exhausting?”

She pursed her lips and shrugged. “I guess sometimes, yeah, but I don’t mind. I’m happy to help, and I don’t want to let anyone down.”

“It’s not wrong to take time for yourself, ya know,” he said, turning to face her. “When does Marinette get to relax?”

“I guess I...” Her eyebrows knitted together. “I don’t know.”

Adrien opened his mouth to speak, but the buzz of her phone cut him off.

“Oh! I promised Rose I’d help her with her scrapbooking project,” she said, standing up. “Um, great work today.”

“Yeah, sure,” Adrien said, biting his lip before standing and grabbing her wrist. “Marinette.” She turned to him, dark lashes fluttering against her mask. “You deserve some down time too, ya know. Don’t burn yourself out.”

She searched his expression for a moment then smiled. “Thanks, Adrien.”

Seeming unsure at first, she rocked back on her heels then stretched up to kiss his cheek. He touched the spot as she trotted off, chewing his lip thoughtfully. At first, he thought this partnership would give him more insight on Marinette, but so far, she was still an enigma.



Adrien sat at his desk the next day, staring down at the lucky charm Marinette gave him. His fingers drummed on his thigh, his mind whirling. Something hadn’t sat right with him since this club started, and he couldn’t place his finger on what it was. Marinette had always been a puzzle to him that he couldn’t quite crack, and their last conversation replayed in his mind, perplexing him more and more each time.

Marinette was an amazing friend, and he was starting to think that was the problem. It wasn’t that her looking out for others bothered him, quite the opposite. He admired that about her. Marinette always put her friends first no matter how much it inconvenienced her, and it made him wonder: If Marinette was always everyone else’s hero, then who was *her* hero? The person who would always go to bat for her when she needed it. Who cheered her up on bad days and brought her cookies when she needed a pick-me-up?

“Are you going to keep staring at that all day?” Plagg asked, floating overhead, and Adrien blinked out of his trance.

“Plagg, who do you think Marinette turns to when she needs someone?” Adrien asked, and his kwami sank down onto the desk.

“That’s what you’ve been thinking about for the last 20 minutes?” He asked with a hint of exasperation.

“Well, Marinette started this whole club just so her friends wouldn’t be sad about losing their superpowers, and she’s always doing stuff like that for everyone,” Adrien said, resting his chin on his fist. “She never asks for anything in return, and I have to wonder if she has anyone she trusts like that, and if she doesn’t, why can’t that someone be me?”

“Don’t tell me you’re falling for another girl. I thought this one was just a friend?” Plagg leaned his head back with a groan, and Adrien rubbed the space behind his ears with a chuckle.

“She is just a friend. A wonderful, amazing friend, and I want her to have someone to turn to when she needs help like she does for everyone else,” Adrien said. He trailed his fingers over the beads of his charm before standing up. “Come on. There’s someone I want to talk to.”



“Thanks for meeting me.”

Adrien smiled at Alya, gesturing to the empty seat across from him at the small round table. The café was tiny, and a bit secluded, but that’s why Adrien liked it. No one would ever expect to find him there, making it the perfect place for a private conversation.

“No problem, what’s up?” Alya asked, accepting a scone as Adrien scooted a plate closer to her.

“I wanted to ask you something. It’s about Marinette,” he said, and this seemed to pique her interest.

“Yeah?”

“Well, you’re her best friend, so you probably know her better than anyone...” Adrien rubbed the back of his neck, and Alya shrugged.

“We’re really tight, but sometimes I swear that girl leads a double life. She’s always rushing all over the place. Why do you ask?”

“I’ve just been thinking. She and I have gotten to spend a lot of time together since we started this club, and she’s always looking for ways to help other people,” Adrien said, swirling his coffee with a stirrer. “I never realized how much she sacrifices for everyone else.”

“Marinette’s just like that. She’s a good person,” Alya said with a smile. “I mean, she looks out for everyone. Rose, Juleka, me, you-”

“Me?” Adrien tilted his head to the side.

“Well, yeah, she’s done some stuff for you,” Alya said.

“Like what?”

“Uhh, ya know, just stuff.” Alya shifted in her seat under his inquisitive stare before sighing. “Okay, okay, but don’t tell her I told you because she’s really weird about telling people this stuff...So, you remember when you lost your dad’s book, and he pulled you out of school then the book just kind of showed up again?”

“Yeah?”

“Well, apparently Marinette went digging through trash cans to find it so that you could come back to school. She even made up some cover story to tell your dad so he wouldn’t be mad at you,” Alya said. “Oh, and I know this is probably gonna be a bummer, but that scarf you got for your birthday that you thought was from your dad? It was actually Marinette who made it for you.”

“Wait, I’ve worn that scarf around her like a dozen times. She never said anything.” Adrien shook his head.

“I told her to tell you, but she didn’t want to ruin it for you because you seemed really happy to have gotten a gift from your dad.” Adrien sat back in his chair and pursed his lips.

“I never realized those things,” he murmured.

“She didn’t do any of it to win your praise. She did it because she cares about you,” Alya said, and Adrien bit his lip.

“I want to do something. Will you help me?”

.....
Chapter 4
.....

The art room bustled with chatter as kids of all ages splattered paint on canvases. A Saturday morning community art class was Marinette's idea, and it was proving to be a huge hit. They'd even convinced their art teacher to let them use the art room at school.

Adrien stifled a yawn as he patrolled an aisle, careful not to betray his true exhaustion to Marinette. He'd stayed up all night working on a surprise for her. Plagg made fun of him for putting in so much effort, but Marinette did so much more for everyone else all the time. If he was going to be Marinette's personal hero, then he was going to give it his all without complaining. Besides, his grogginess was overshadowed by the giddiness fluttering in his stomach.

The rest of the morning crawled by, and Adrien counted the minutes. It wasn't that he was eager for their art class to be over—he just wanted to hurry up and get to his surprise. Marinette deserved to have someone who protected her the way she protected others, and he wanted to be that someone.

When the last kid finally left, they set to work cleaning. Marinette gathered all the paint brushes and rinsed them in the sink while Adrien put away the easels. Each tick of the clock echoed louder now that they were alone, and he only hoped she'd like what he had planned.

"Is everything else put away?" She asked when he approached.

"Yeah, it's all good," he said, heart hammering.

"Awesome. I'm almost done with these then maybe we can go back to my house for some tea and cookies. If you want," she offered.

"Uh, sure, but I think I left something in Mlle. Bustier's classroom yesterday. Will you walk with me to go get it?" He asked as she shut off the sink and flicked water from her hands.

"Sure."

Adrien suppressed a smirk as they walked, masking his excitement, albeit poorly. Marinette didn't seem to notice which only made his blood pump faster. Was this how she felt all the time? It was exhilarating.

“Surprise!” Their classmates cheered the moment Adrien opened the door.

“What-” Marinette blinked, flicking her gaze between their fellow clubmates.

Streamers hung from wall-to-wall, colorful balloons tied around their desks, and a large banner spanned the chalkboard with the words ‘*Rejected Heroes Club*’ written in his own neat cursive. Everyone worked hard to ensure everything was perfect because Marinette would have done the same.

“Welcome to the first ever Rejected Heroes Club awards ceremony,” Alya said.

“You guys did all of this?” Marinette gestured to all of the decorations and snacks.

“Well, in honor of our new club, we wanted to give out a very special award to our founder,” Nino said, draping an arm over Alya’s shoulders.

“Seeing as you always stick your neck out for everyone, we thought it appropriate to bestow you with an award to celebrate your heroic deeds that inspire us all,” Max added.

Kim leapt from behind a desk, striking a pose on top. “You’re totally everyone’s hero, so when Adrien suggested we throw you a party, we didn’t think twice.”

When Marinette turned to face him, Adrien retrieved the trophy from behind Mlle. Bustier’s desk. It was an old fencing trophy of his, but he’d had a new plaque installed.

“For your selfless devotion to others, I present to you the *True Hero of Paris* award,” he said. Her eyes watered as she traced her fingers over the inscription.

“*You’re totally everyone’s hero, so when Adrien suggested we throw you a party, we didn’t think twice.*”

“Guys,” she squeaked, and they all crowded around for a group hug.

“Thanks for always having our back, Marinette,” Alya said, nuzzling against her shoulder.

“Yeah, it’s too bad you’re not actually Ladybug because you’d be way awesome as a real hero,” Kim said, and Adrien’s cheeks warmed at the thought.

Marinette as Ladybug. Now there was a thought to send his heart into overdrive. He wouldn’t have minded if it were Marinette; she was so easygoing and kind that it would have been as natural as breathing to fall in love with her. But it was too perfect to be true. If the girl under the mask were half as amazing as Marinette, Adrien would be satisfied.

“I’m way too clumsy to be Ladybug,” Marinette said, waving it away, and the group agreed with a laugh.

“Alright, let’s get this party started!” Nino said, moving to his DJ table.

As their friends dispersed, Adrien hung back with Marinette. “Can I talk to you for a minute?” He asked. She tilted her head to the side, but didn’t question as he led her into the hall.

“What’s up?”

“There’s something else I wanted to give you,” he said, retrieving a pink box tied with a blue ribbon from behind his back.

“Adrien, you didn’t have to get me anything,” she said, but her gratitude reflected in those soft blue eyes.

“I wanted to. You’re an amazing friend and partner, and I want you to know how much I appreciate you.” He rubbed the back of his neck. “I made this myself, but it kind of came out wrong, so sorry about that.”

Marinette tugged the bow, lifting the lid of the box to reveal a pink, hand-knit scarf. Or rather, it was supposed to be a scarf. The stitching was littered with holes and loose thread, and the overall shape was uneven. Knitting was harder than it looked, and as it turned out, having a fashion mogul for a dad did not bestow him with any natural talent.

“Alya told me about the scarf you made for my birthday,” he said, and when her eyes widened, he added, “It’s okay. I understand why you didn’t tell me, and I’m really grateful to have a friend like you. This experience has made me realize how much you give to other people, and I just wanted to give something back to you for once.”

Marinette traced her thumb over a lop-sided hole and smiled. “Thank you, Adrien. I love it.”

Adrien’s cheeks warmed as she stepped into his arms and leaned against his chest. He nuzzled close, her soft hair tickling his cheek.

“You’re our everyday Ladybug, Marinette, and I’ve realized that I want to be your everyday Chat Noir. If you ever need anything...you can always count on me,” he said when they pulled away. “Let me be your hero.”

Marinette's cheeks flushed as pink as the accents on her suit, and when she stretched up to kiss his cheek, his skin burned under her lips.

"I guess that makes us partners then," she said, raising her fist. "So, what do you say, partner? Me and you against the world?"

For a moment Adrien saw another girl standing before him. Marinette really was a lot like Ladybug. They even kind of looked alike...

He shook the thought from his mind and touched his fist to hers. There was no way. Marinette wasn't Ladybug. He'd seen that firsthand. She was just a friend, a partner, and a wonderful person. A heroine in her own right, and he was her hero.

"Always."

THE END



Story Prompt Challenge

Looking for inspiration? Try these prompts and tag [@adriennettezine](#) on Tumblr.

Adrien is a world-famous model. He goes on a romantic cruise, which his girlfriend ends up not going due to her job but doesn't find out until later; he ends up having a one night stand with another passenger who ends up in his room due to the room number falling to make the number look like another number.

Marinette, who lives on an island that grows ginger, her life is quiet and predictable. She and her boyfriend (who only cares about the money) end up going on a romantic cruise. He ends up dumping herself after the cruise starts for a younger, prettier woman. Saddened by this, Marinette gets tipsy and ends up going back to her room, which is Adrien's room, by mistake. They end up making love to one another. It isn't until afterward do they realize their error. Marinette ends up pregnant from the one nightstand.

Adrien's girlfriend ends up breaking up with him over text. She claims her attention needs to be on her career with no distraction, and she considers him a distraction. Of course, he is sure his father will have something to say about it.

The Fateful Rainfall

by: Goldgalaxytea

BETA: Laurel

The rain transforms the world. It can obscure things in plain sight; hide those that wish to be hidden from the rest of the world, allow a blanket of invisibility to protect those that want to escape their prison, and it can bring together complete opposites.

The world of Gods and Goddesses wasn't very different from the mortal world, both realms full of love and hatred, happiness and sadness, freedom and imprisonment. Despite possessing the power to shape the world and ichor flowing through one's veins, it did not always allow the gods and goddesses the luxury to choose what road they travel in the world.

The God of Spring, a young man draped in a pure white chiton with blonde hair that shone like gold in the sunlight and bright green eyes that glittered like emeralds, suffered that unfortunate fate. To the mortals he was known as Kore, though to the other deities he was known as Adrien. His father, Gabriel, known as Demeter to the mortals, was the God of Agriculture. Unlike most deities the two lived in the mortal realm, though only the older man ever conversed with them, Adrien being forbidden by his father from even sneaking a glance. His father had been excessively protective since the demise of his mother.

Her death broke something in him, he grew distant with everyone, even his own son. Gabriel no longer showed kindness to the mortals or took the time to talk to them. He treated his duties as merely a job, a process that had to be done in an orderly manner and as efficiently as possible. Despite scarcely interacting with his son he still feared losing him, so he created a prison disguised as a safe haven. They moved to a secluded

valley far away from mortals or gods, a region surrounded and hidden by a massive forest. Gabriel created a home for them there from the forest around them, locked the door, and set up guards outside.

His father allowed him outside, but under only under the conditions that he brought his bodyguards, two minor gods named Nathalie and Gorilla, and that he never left the valley or entered the forest. Adrien loved his father, yet he despised what he had become and the rules he had enforced. He longed to see the world once again, to speak with someone that would actually talk with him, to be able to do whatever he desired whenever he wished. Yet that was simply a daydream, a pleasant thought to lessen the crushing weight of imprisonment throughout his days.

He had one more thing to help him through his struggle, his only friend, a wild black cat that had wandered into the valley a few months after their move. The poor thing had been knocking on death's door when Adrien found him, but with the help of the young god he was led back to the land of the living. After that the cat stuck around, following Adrien like a third, more pleasant bodyguard. The cat was given the name Plagg by his new friend.

Plagg was a free spirited cat, doing whatever he wanted whenever he wanted, much to the annoyance of Gabriel. The black cat loathed Adrien's father for an unknown reason, constantly scratching him and spitting hairballs at him. Once he stared the man directly in the eyes as he threw up all over his lap. After that event it took hours for Adrien to stop laughing. The black cat's courage and carefree attitude inspired the same in Adrien little by little everyday. Until finally, he was ready to break free.



Most people disliked the rain, thinking it gave the world a gloomy feel and forcing them to remain indoors. Yet Adrien wasn't most. He loved the rain, loved to watch the sky light up in a show, loved to feel the rain on his skin as he danced in the puddles scattered around the valley.

The rain also provided the perfect cover for anyone trying not to be seen by others.

The loud roar of thunder drowned out the sound of Adrien's footsteps as he crept past his father and bodyguards. Plagg excitedly ran around his legs, urging him towards the doorway. Once there he cautiously glanced back to be certain that the other gods

were still unaware of his departure. A flash of lightning revealed his slumbering guardians, completely motionless with no sign of awakening. With a deep breath, Adrien turned and left.

The storm lit up the valley for him as he ran through the wet grass, wild winds pushing his hair back. Adrien danced through the valley, his joyful laughter singing along with the rumbling sky. Plagg followed alongside him, letting out happy meows here and there. The valley felt a lot less confining without being under constant surveillance. The god's feet led him to where the valley ended and the forest began. The darkness called to him, promising new places, new people, new adventures. Adrien didn't hesitate to journey into the forbidden place.

Surrounded by so many trees and bushes it felt like an entirely different world. The valley quickly faded away as Adrien wandered deeper into the lush greenery. The clouded sky concealed most of the moonlight, leaving the forest nearly pitch black, yet, as he traveled deeper into the unknown, a light pink glow emitted from behind the trees. He followed the soft glow, curious to what was causing it.

At the source of the light he found a circular portal in the grass of a small clearing. He peered down the hole, a marble staircase with intricate designs carved into its surface descended into a soft void. The staircase was beautiful, though it did not hold a candle to the goddess ascending them.

Her hair fell to her shoulders, dark as the surrounding night. Her raven locks were a sharp contrast to her shining blue bell eyes and light pink chiton. The goddess appeared to be around his age, which made Adrien excited. He could finally make a real friend!

The young woman didn't notice him as she reached the top of the stairs, lost in her own thoughts, though the rain and dark could also be the cause. As she stepped onto the grass the portal dispersed, leaving the forest in darkness once more.

"Um, hello!" Adrien greeted the stranger. The goddess jumped, letting out a squeak as she slipped on the wet grass. Before she could collide with the hard ground Adrien caught her in his arms.

"Oh my, I'm so sorry! I didn't mean to startle you." Adrien helped the goddess regain her balance. "I'm Adrien."

"I know who you are, God of Spring." She studied him while Adrien sheepishly refused to meet her eyes.

“Oh, uh, my apologies, I don’t know your name. I haven’t met many other gods.”

“It’s okay.” She hesitated for a few seconds. “My name is Marinette.” Adrien finally met her eyes again, his lips sculpted into a bright smile.

“It’s nice to meet you, Marinette!” Her eyes widened in surprise for only a second before she smiled back at him.

“It’s nice to meet you too, Adrien.” Her head tilted, curious eyes watching him. “What are you doing in the woods so late?”

“Oh I’m just enjoying the weather. It’s very beautiful.”

“You enjoy the rain?”

“Yes, don’t you?”

“No... the rain brings back unpleasant memories for me.”

“I’m sorry...”

“You don’t need to apologize, it’s not your fault... .” Marinette’s voice trailed off, a deep sadness coating her words.

The forest was filled with an awkward silence. Adrien broke through it, not wanting this conversation to end quite yet.

“What if we made some pleasant memories for you?”

“What do you mean?” Marinette inquired.

“The rain brings you sadness, we could change that, make it bring you happiness instead.” He offered her his hand in invitation. She pondered the idea while Adrien awaited her decision. “You don’t have to if you don’t want to of course.” Marinette gently intertwined their hands.

“I want to.” Her smile was warm like a hearth. Adrien returned it tenfold.

“May I have this dance, my lady?”

“You may.”

Adrien laced their free hands together, using the hold to guide her in a dance. Marinette followed along, steps uncertain as she tried not to trip or step on his feet.

“*The staircase was beautiful, though it did not hold a candle to the goddess ascending them.*”

Nevertheless as they spun and twirled underneath the storm she found her rhythm, becoming more confident in her steps. The smile gracing her lips never faded as her soft laughter drowned out the rumbling thunder.

Adrien couldn't tear his eyes away from her, captivated by the pure joy painted across her face. His mind was too tangled up in the goddess, forgetting about the slippery grass. All it took was one misstep and his feet fell out from under him. Unfortunately he took Marinette down with him. Fortunately he landed on his back, cushioning her fall with his own.

“*Adrien couldn't tear his eyes away from her, captivated by the pure joy painted across her face.*”

“Marinette are you okay?” Adrien questioned, concerned for the goddess laying on his chest. Marinette's soft giggles transformed into roaring laughter. Her laugh sounded like a song of happiness, Adrien couldn't help but laugh with her. They laughed for quite awhile, uncaring for the storm that raged above them.

As their laughter faded away Adrien propped himself up so that he could look at her.

“See, I told you the rain was beautiful.” Adrien teased. Marinette froze when her eyes met his, her cheeks now dusted with a soft pink similar to her chiton.

“Yes, it's very beautiful...”

They lost themselves in each other's eyes, both caught up in the sweet moment. Though sadly, all good things must come to an end. Not even a moment later, lightning struck a few feet away from them. Startled, they both scrambled to their feet. Adrien opened his mouth but before any sound could emerge someone called out from the trees.

“Adrien!” His father shouted. Adrien jumped, head turning to see his father running towards him from the treeline. He turned back to Marinette, a goodbye on his tongue but she was already gone. “Adrien, what were you thinking? You know the rules...”

His father's scolding faded away as his mind wandered back to the mysterious goddess. He desperately wanted to see her again, but those odds were now slim. There was no way his father would allow him to sneak away ever again. Plagg hissed and bit the older man's legs the entire journey back. The frown never left him as Gabriel dragged him home. Adrien was a prisoner once more.



Once a prisoner has a taste of freedom it's hard to return to the way things were before. Adrien wanted nothing more than to run off into the night again, but after his last escape his father had him under even tighter chains. No matter what he tried he couldn't get away.

The next month passed slowly for the young god. Days spent bored out of his mind as he daydreamed about freedom and seeing his friend again. In a way, he ended up getting his wish when his father interrupted his train of thought to tell him he would be coming with him on his trip to Olympus. He had business to discuss with another god and he didn't trust Adrien after what he had pulled.

It was nice to visit someplace that wasn't the valley, though it wasn't the same as being free. Adrien sat outside the room his father disappeared into, patiently waiting like a good son. He quickly grew restless, unable to shake the wanderlust from his bones. As he contemplated sneaking away while his father was distracted, someone sat down next to him.

"Hey Adrien! What brings you here?"

"Oh, hey Lila." Lila was her name among the gods, to the mortals she was Zeus, Goddess of the Sky and Queen of the Gods. "My father had a meeting and he brought me along."

"Your dad is so great, always working hard, that's very admirable. Anyway, are you okay?" Her eyes held worry, as if he'd been hurt. Adrien raised his eyebrows.

"I'm alright... why do you ask?"

"Well last month I saw you with the Goddess of Death and I've been worried ever since! Did she hurt you or say something mean? Just give me the word and I'll punish her." Lila spoke a mile a moment, leaving Adrien at a loss for words.

"I'm sorry, I don't think I understand. What are you talking about?"

"The storm last month, you ran into the cold and cruel Hades. Don't you remember, Adrien?" Lila started fawning over him, observing his head. "Did she mess with your mind? That's low, even for her!" Adrien swatted her hands away.

“I’m okay, no one messed with my mind.” Suddenly the dots connected. The mysterious Goddess, the storm, what Lila was saying. “Wait... Marinette is the Goddess of Death?”

Lila’s eyes went comically wide, her mouth following suit before it was covered by her hand.

“Did you not know that? Oh my, you didn’t even know the danger you were in!” She gasped. Adrien frowned.

“I wasn’t in any danger... she wasn’t anything like you said. She was very kind and sweet and-” “No!” Lila screamed. “She was tricking you! The Goddess of Death puts on an act, pretending to be nice and friendly and then once your guard is down she strikes! Oh Adrien, promise me you’ll stay away from her, I don’t want you getting hurt...” Lila pleaded with him, batting her eyelashes.

“I-”

“Come along Adrien, it’s time to go.” His father pulled him away, saving him from having to answer. Lila waved farewell as he left.

“Remember what I said, Adrien!” The God of Spring turned to leave, unable to see the kind smile slip from the Queen’s face, a cruel smirk taking its place.



Adrien’s mind was a swirling storm when he arrived home, though now instead of daydreams it was confusion. There was no conceivable way Marinette could be tricking him. Her kindness and smile were too warm to be fake. He refused to believe it, he needed to know the truth for himself. There was only one way to do that.

The rest of the day he played the role of a good obedient son, trying his best to get his father to loosen the lock on him. Luckily he seemed to believe the act, pleased that his son was behaving so well. So when night fell it was no challenge at all to sneak away.

Adrien made his way through the dark to where he had first met Marinette. He knew it was a long shot that she would be there again, but nonetheless he was still disappointed to find the clearing empty. As a last resort there was one way he could contact her. Gods could be summoned by name, though only if they responded. There was a possibility Marinette wouldn’t show. Yet Adrien had to try, no matter what happened.

“Hades, I wish to speak with you.” He spoke into the night. A few minutes passed and no glowing portal appeared. “Please Mari...” He pleaded, in hopes that it would do something, anything. Yet nothing happened. With a sigh Adrien turned to leave, coming face to face with Marinette. Her face was distorted by sadness.

“You know...” Tears gathered in her eyes yet she refused to look at him.

“I do.” Adrien tentatively held one of her hands. Her eyes snapped to his but she didn’t pull away. “I want to know more about you, from you, not from others. Will you tell me?”

Marinette nodded, gently pulling the god to the ground with her. Once they were settled, she began her tale.

“I wasn’t always feared by both gods and mortals. A very long time ago, near the beginning of this world, they loved me. But Lila hated all the attention I got from her subjects, so she spread lies about me. She started countless rumors and stories about how I was cruel and vicious, about how terrible the afterlife was, and so on. Lila was queen of everything so they believed her. I tried to prove the lies wrong, I did everything to show them I wasn’t what she said I was but the damage was done. No one would believe me over her and even if they did, everyone was too scared to approach me and find out the truth. So eventually I just gave up and it’s been a lonely eternity ever since. That is, until I met you...”

“ Her eyes snapped to his but she didn’t pull away.”

By the end her tears had finally fallen. Adrien wrapped his arms around her, cradling her to his chest. Her hands clung tightly to his clothes while sobs wracked her body.

“I’m so sorry that happened to you...” Adrien whispered into her hair. Marinette snorted, choking on a sob in the process.

“You need to stop apologizing for things that are not your fault.” Adrien pulled back so that he could wipe her tears away.

“I know.” He pried her death grip from the front of his chiton, taking her hands and holding them in his own. “But what she did was wrong, you shouldn’t have been treated like that.” Marinette gave him a shaky smile.

“Thank you for everything, Adrien.”

“Of course, Mari.” Her tears were gone now yet her eyes still held sadness in their depths. Quickly he thought of something to cheer her up. “I must admit I’m curious, what is the Underworld actually like? If you feel up to it, maybe you could give me a tour? I’d love to see your world.”

Marinette looked surprised but not upset.

“Sure, I’d love to show you!”

With a wave of her hand a portal like he’d seen when they first met opened in the ground next to him. Adrien helped Mari to her feet, before gesturing to the staircase.

“After you, my lady.”

Together they descended.

“*With a wave of her hand a portal like he’d seen when they first met opened in the ground next to him.*”

At the bottom of the stairs was an enormous marble archway with detailed drawings carved into them. The art depicted the story of life, from beginning to end. Even more impressive was the giant dog guarding the entrance. Marinette whistled for the beast.

“This is Tikki, she guards the entrance to the Underworld.” Tikki leaned all three of her heads down for Marinette to pet. Her fur was a vibrant red with black circles on top of each head. Plagg came running down the stairs behind them, stopping to sniff Tikki’s middle head. The dog sniffed him back, letting out a happy bark before licking the cat. Plagg screeched, running through the archway. Tikki took it as an invitation to play, chasing after the black cat.

“Shall we?” Marinette held her hand out to him, which he gladly took.

“We shall.”

Together they entered the Underworld.

Adrien wasn’t sure what to expect. He knew it wouldn’t look like the rumors he’s heard about the Underworld. He didn’t expect a dark and dreary underground cave filled with screaming souls of the deceased. But he also didn’t expect it to look like the world above. Vibrant green grass covered the ground, a beautiful blue sky held a bright sun that lit up the town laying below it. Houses of various sizes and materials laid next to each other, connected together by streets and roads. Spirits walked about, happy and smiling.

“Wow... it’s beautiful.” Awe shined brightly in Adrien’s eyes.

“Thank you, I designed this entire place myself. I wanted the spirits to be happy during their eternity.” A soft pink dusted her face. Adrien’s wonderstruck eyes landed on her.

“You’re amazing, Marinette.” He smiled dreamily while Mari’s pink cheeks darkened.

“T-Thank you!” She cleared her throat. “It’s not all beautiful though. See that mountain with the locked door over there?” Adrien nodded. “That’s Tartarus. It’s where the bad souls are. It’s most like the rumors you hear.”

Mari led him around, giving him an in depth tour of the Underworld and her home there. By the time they were done the sun was set to rise any minute in the land above.

“It’s nearly daytime, you should head home. Everyone knows how strict Gabriel is...” Mari moved to lead him back to the archway but he stopped her.

“I... don’t wish to go back.” The goddess’s eyes widened.

“You mean...”

“I want to stay here with you. My ‘home’ isn’t really a home, it’s a prison. Here I can be free and do what I wish. I would also get to see you everyday.” Nervously he asked “So... may I stay here?”

Marinette tackled him into a hug, squeezing the life out of him.

“Of course you can stay, Adrien.”



The God of Spring quickly adjusted to his new life in the Underworld. He finally got what he had always dreamed about, freedom. Everyday he had the choice of where to go and what to do. He avoided all contact with his father, not wanting to ever be dragged back into his prison. Months passed by quickly as he and Marinette grew closer, each day they loved each other more and more until they decided to get married.

But the dream-like days were short lived. Gabriel had finally found Adrien. They were not certain how he had found out but he knew and was demanding to see him. Reluctantly they agreed to meet at the archway separating the two worlds. When the Queen and King of the Underworld arrived Gabriel was already waiting for them.

“There you are, Adrien. Let’s go home.” Gabriel didn’t even spare his son a second glance before turning and ascending back up the stairs. He didn’t notice his new green chiton, he didn’t notice his hand intertwined with Marinette’s, he didn’t notice that his eyes no longer held a haunting sadness.

“No.” Gabriel paused.

“No?” He turned back to his son, face stern. “What do you mean no?”

“No, I’m not going back. I love it here, I don’t feel like a prisoner. I can go wherever I want, when I want, by myself. I-”

“Nonsense.” Gabriel cut him off. “I did those things to keep you safe. You’re not safe here with the Goddess of Death, so-”

“No!” Adrien screamed. “I’m never going back. You weren’t protecting me, you were hurting me. I suffered everyday, stuck inside a cage you made. I’m a lot safer and happier here with Marinette. I’ll never go with you, you can’t make me.”

“We’ll see about that.” Gabriel sneered. “I’ll make you regret your words.” And with that he was gone.

True to his words, the God of Agriculture gave his son an ultimatum. Come home or the mortals shall suffer because of him.

Gabriel used his powers to kill the mortals’ harvest, leaving the humans to starve and the world to grow cold. Lila spread the lie throughout the world that it was Adrien’s fault for their suffering, so the mortals stopped calling him Kore and gave him the name Persphone. They begged and prayed for him to help them but he couldn’t. Going back wasn’t something he could do, but he couldn’t let the mortals suffer like this. Months passed and he couldn’t watch their pain anymore. With a shaky breath, he turned to his wife.

“Let’s go have a meeting with my father.”



The tension in the room was so thick you could cut it with a blade. Gabriel stared daggers at Marinette while Adrien avoided even looking in the general direction of his father. Moments passed before the young god cleared his throat, finally meeting eyes with Gabriel across the table.

“Father, you need to stop this. You’re killing innocent people-”

“That’s not my fault, Adrien. It’s yours. Stop this nonsense-” He sneered at Marinette “and I’ll fix the world.”

Adrien glared at his father.

“Leave Marinette out of this, she hasn’t done anything wrong. I’m a grown up you don’t need to treat me like a child. I get to decide my life, not you.”

“Fine. Then the mortals shall continue to die by the thousands.”

The two gods stared each other down, unwilling to back down. Marinette cleared her throat.

“What if we had a compromise?” The men turned towards her, curious to what she would propose. “You want Adrien to come home but he wants to stay here, so what if he did both? Half of each year he’ll spend with his father and the other half with his wife.”

“I’ll admit it’s not ideal...” Adrien held out his hand to his father. “But it’s the best alternative. Do we have a deal, father?”

Seconds stretched agonizingly into minutes before Gabriel grasped his son’s hand.

“It’s a deal.” The older god rose from his chair. “You’ve already been in the Underworld for half a year now, it’s time for my half. Let’s go home, Adrien.” Gabriel left without looking back. Adrien paused on his way out, tenderly cupping Mari’s face and bringing her in for a kiss. Their lips brushed before he pulled back, resting his forehead to hers.

“I’m going to miss you.” He whispered. “I’m going to miss you too, my love.” Adrien brought her in for one more kiss before they parted ways. The God of Spring followed after his father, turning around at the archway for one last farewell.

“See you in the fall, my dear.”

THE END



In the Rain · Rose Manley

The Eye Opener

by: JuliaFC

BETA: Agrestebug, Etoile-Lead-Sama, Khanofallorcs and Genxha

SPECIAL THANKS: Roxas Wrw, Aetheraaa, peachy and adventuremaker21

What if, post Miracle Queen. Sitting with Kagami in her car just after they ate ice creams with his classmates, Adrien is confused. Marinette had been crying, and he can't understand why. A chat with a fed up Kagami opens Adrien's eyes and he finds himself walking in the rain and finally clarifying in his head which set of pigtails hold his heart.

He had seen her tears.

He had seen them, and they left him completely confused. He thought she loved Luka, but yet, as she walked towards Luka holding André's ice cream and sat down to eat it with him, she had looked melancholic and almost dead inside. Why was she crying? The more he thought about it, the less it made sense.

"Are you okay, Adrien?" came Kagami's voice, bringing him back to reality. He looked around as if he had just woken up from a dream. Oh yes. He was in Kagami's car; she was driving him back home after finishing their ice cream. He nodded absentmindedly, but she put a hand on his leg and with the other, she tilted his chin to meet her gaze. "Your expression would suggest otherwise," she stated simply. "Either you tell me what's wrong or I swear to God, I will stop the car, kick you out and force you to walk home."

That would actually be a welcome outcome, he thought. He would have had some time to gather his thoughts and clear his mind before heading back to the prison he called home. He was quiet for a long time, still lost in thought, but noticed that Kagami's hand was still resting on his leg. He glanced at her, seeing her expectant gaze.

“I’m confused,” he eventually admitted.

“About what?” she asked.

He sighed. “She was crying,” he said, as if it explained everything. He saw Kagami giving him a questioning look. “I thought she loved Luka.”

Understanding spread all over Kagami’s face. She started to frown, why did she suddenly look sad? Why was nobody telling him anything?

“I see,” she whispered. She pulled her hand back as if it burned, moving as far as she could away from him to the other side of the car, folding her arms on her chest and crossing her legs.. A couple of minutes passed in deafening silence, making him more and more uncomfortable. He didn’t know why, but he suddenly felt that he had hurt Kagami and had no idea why, *again*. “Was that the reason why you shared ice cream with me?” she added.

He gave her an even more confused look. “What do you mean?”

She looked him straight in the eyes, meeting his confused gaze with her defeated one. “You really don’t get it, do you?” She saw the sedan approaching the Agreste mansion and quickly spoke up to the computer on board, “Bring us back to the Eiffel Tower.” This confused Adrien even more and he looked at her in utter puzzlement. She must have noticed it because she added, “I haven’t finished talking to you.”

As the car drove past the Agreste mansion and continued turning to the left, Adrien pouted and rested his right elbow on his leg, his head firmly held by his right hand.

“Why is everyone keeping stuff from me?” He snorted. “Marinette was crying today and I have no idea why, and now you are speaking in riddles. If you know why she’s so upset, say it clearly because I certainly don’t understand. She was having ice cream with her boyfriend. What could be upsetting in that picture?”

Kagami sighed loudly and gave him a decisive look. “I will probably regret saying what I’m going to say, Adrien, but as much as I love you I can’t take this any longer.”

His heart skipped a beat. “What do you mean?”

“You ask what could be upsetting in that picture. Well, I’m telling you what would be upsetting. Maybe that Luka *isn’t* Marinette’s boyfriend, or maybe, even worse, that she’s being pushed towards making him her boyfriend because the guy she really likes is more blind than my mother.”

“I don’t understand,” he muttered, completely ignoring the last sentence. “She should have been happy and instead, even while she was eating her ice cream, I felt a heavy sense of melancholy there that I didn’t know how to interpret. I don’t know what it means.” He put his hands in his hair and groaned. “If you know something I don’t, Kagami, please tell me. I want Marinette to be happy; she’s one of my best friends.”

Kagami cringed when he said the last few words. “Of course. One of your *best friends*. You nailed the problem right there.” She sighed at the lingering confused look on his face and moved closer, a forced smile on her lips. “I love you, Adrien, but I can’t understand how a boy as well educated and intelligent as you can be so thick.”

“Huh?” was the only thing he could say.

She sighed again. “Adrien, we shared an ice cream this afternoon, and we even cuddled, but when I tried to kiss you earlier today you said you weren’t ready. Why?”

“*I want Marinette to be happy; she’s one of my best friends.*”

“Why are you changing subjects?”

“I’m not changing subjects, Mr. Dense.” He pouted at her words and she forced a smile. “Answer the question.”

“I told you,” he said simply. “I don’t feel ready.”

“Yes. Because *you don’t love me*.” His heart skipped a beat. He was going to respond, but she put a finger over his mouth and continued, “Don’t you dare argue the point. If you loved me, you would have been ready.”

She smiled another heavy smile. “I won’t be someone’s second choice, Adrien. And I refuse to wait any longer. You don’t love me and as much as I love you, I can’t continue like this. I shared André’s ice cream with you today and you were so focused on Marinette’s tears that you completely failed to notice how my heart was dying every time you glanced at her. And you know why?” He shook his head slowly, understanding spreading through him as the wheels in his brain started turning. “Because I’m not as important to you as... *her*.”

“I... I’m n-not in... l-love with her...” He started to say, his heart racing madly in a newfound home inside his throat. Jesus, it couldn’t be, could it? What kind an idiot would he be if that was the truth? Kagami gave him a look so full of mockery that he felt all blood rushing to his face. “... am I?”

She laughed humorlessly. “You are asking *me*? It’s *your* heart, mister, *you* should be the expert!”

“B-but s-she... she likes L-Luka!” He didn’t like where the conversation was heading, nor did he like the serious look Kagami was giving him. He cupped his hands on his face, resting both elbows on his legs while he replayed the events that happened that afternoon. He’d clearly seen Marinette kissing Luka on the cheek and smiling at him while he played a beautiful tune on his guitar for her. He’d seen her sharing her ice cream with him. But... she wasn’t happy. She was full of sadness. And she had cried before going to him. Why was she so melancholic and why had she cried? If she didn’t like Luka... then who?

“*Why was she so melancholic
and why had she cried?
If she didn’t like Luka... then who?*”

“I don’t think she likes Luka any more than you like me, Adrien. I don’t think she considers him, now or ever, her first choice, exactly like you will never consider me yours.” She felt the car stopping in front of the Eiffel Tower and ordered again, “Bring us back to the Agreste Mansion.”

He looked at her worriedly. “I do like you, Kagami. You’re a beautiful girl and I really admire how decisive and strong you are.”

“I’m flattered you admire me for something, Adrien, but I don’t think admiration is the same as love. And I want you to *love* me, if we are to carry on exploring a future relationship.” His face fell, because the second she said it, he realised it was true. And he felt horrible. “Which I know you can’t do, because I’m *just a friend* to you, Adrien. I will never be more and this conversation made me see it even more clearly.”

“You’re dumping me then.” It was a statement, not a question.

“Ha, as if. I can’t dump someone who was never mine. And don’t look at me like that,” she said when he frowned and looked back at her. “Do you think I didn’t notice how jealous you were of Luka that time at the ice rink?”

“I wasn’t...” he started to say, but she pushed his shoulder and laughed a little lighter.

“Yes, you were. Even there, the only thoughts that ran through your head concerned Marinette, not me. Can you deny leaving me in the middle of the rink to just run after her?”

“I wanted to make sure she was okay!” His voice cracked a little as a huge spike of pressure built up in his gut. No, that couldn’t be true! He tried fighting back the memory of the uneasy feeling he had that day at the rink. The sharp pang that had twisted his insides when he had seen Marinette skating with Luka. At the time he had just dismissed it as being worried that Luka wouldn’t treat his good friend well and that Marinette would be unhappy. He had tried to bury his confusion deep inside, to keep it out of his conscious thoughts. But now Kagami was rubbing it in front of his nose and... it made total sense.

“She had a *date* who should have been looking after her—and let me just tell you that he was looking after her. Or at least, he was until another boy started running after her. *You* were on a date with *me*. You left your date in the middle of the rink and ran after *another girl*.” He blushed furiously because he couldn’t escape from her words. She had a point, and a very valid one too.

“I’m sorry,” he said.

“No you’re not,” she retorted. “You’re just confused because, for some strange reason that I still can’t identify, you are in denial.”

“I’m not...” he started, but he couldn’t finish because his heart sank with the realisation that maybe. Maybe. Only maybe... she was right?

His thoughts went back to Marinette, to how cute she was every time she got all tongue tied in front of him, how brave, how wonderful, how fantastic she was every day. How he admired the way she was always there for everyone, how she always made time to help anyone who would ask her, how creative she was, how beautiful her designs were, how proud of her he had felt when she won his father’s derby hat contest.

No, it can’t be.

How that day in the park he had nicknamed her their ‘everyday Ladybug’, because she reminded him of his Lady so much. The buzzing feeling in his stomach when she had kissed him on the cheek. The warm feeling when she had danced with him and how *right* it had felt for him to hold her close. How much he had wanted to impress her as Chat Noir against Evillustrator. How grateful he had felt when she spoke to him and comforted him a bit before his fight with Glaciator.

No!

The way his heart had skipped several beats and his face had felt very hot when Jagged Stone had shown all the pictures of him that Marinette had in her room. The way he just *had* to check the pictures when he got there as Chat Noir. And when she had mentioned them the following morning... he had felt for a moment that she had been lying about having them up simply because she liked fashion. For a long time the previous night he'd been there hugging his pillow and wondering... what if Jagged Stone was right? He had accepted what she said the next morning, but the doubt had gnawed at him for ages.

No no no no no no...

And the day at the museum? Again, as she was declaring her love for him acting as a statue, he had thought that she was telling the truth. She didn't look as if she was joking. Then... she convinced him otherwise. But that flutter in his stomach the second her lips were nearly meeting his... was very different from what he had felt today when Kagami had tried to kiss him. He had pulled back on both occasions. But today he had felt that he didn't want to kiss Kagami; it didn't feel right, he wasn't ready. That time he pulled back only because he panicked; he didn't want Marinette to kiss him thinking that he was a statue. It wouldn't have been fair on her and it would have been a prank gone too far. But for a second, for a teeny tiny split second that in his mind lasted forever, he had actually considered not moving. He had actually wanted to kiss her. Like... when they were filming Nino's movie, and Chloé interrupted him kissing Marinette. He had been so pissed off, it was unreal. At the time he had thought that he had been just fed up with all the interruptions, but... what if that irritation was on completely different grounds?

No...

What about the way his heart had sank when he had seen her bedroom be destroyed the day her dad was akumatized? How upset he'd been that her father wanted to enclose her in a golden cage and keep her safe but alone? Weredad had nearly killed him, but he hadn't given up. He wasn't going to give up. Would he have done the same for any of his friends... or was it only the thought that Marinette was going to suffer that ignited his insides that much? He thought at how elated he'd been when she had suddenly declared her love for him as Chat Noir, and how terrible he had felt the day after, when he had told her that he couldn't reciprocate her feelings...

Oh no...

“I hate that I’m right,” Kagami muttered defeatedly.

He gave her a sheepish look. “But she doesn’t love me.”

Kagami raised an eyebrow. “Says who?”

“She did!” He groaned in total exasperation. “I asked her twice and she said that she admires me because she loves fashion.”

“Adrien, I know for a fact that it’s a lie.” As Kagami spoke, he saw that her car was heading towards the Pont d’Arcole and stopping at a red light. He opened the car door and rushed outside.

“I’ll walk from here. Thank you, Kagami,” he said as the pounding rain began saturating his clothes and hair. He hadn’t even noticed that it was raining, wrapped up as he was in his thoughts. Behind the grey clouds that tattered the sky, the sun must have already set, because the place was fading into dusk and the city lights were slowly turning on.

“Are you sure, Adrien?” He nodded. “Get an umbrella from my boot,” she said, but the traffic light turned green and Adrien just closed the door and rushed to the pavement. Kagami could only turn around and look at him as her car turned on the Pont d’Arcole and disappeared in the traffic.

“*He hadn’t even noticed that it was raining, wrapped up as he was in his thoughts.*”

He sighed and looked up, allowing the drops of rain to wet his face. He put his hands in the pockets of his jeans and started walking aimlessly. He didn’t have a clue where he was going. It was as if his feet were moving by themselves. He crossed the road and started walking up Pont d’Arcole, the heavy raindrops soaking his hair and shirt. But he didn’t care. He needed this time to be alone and think.

“You’re getting soaked. Hide in an alley and transform already,” said Plagg from somewhere behind his neck.

“Nah,” he replied shrugging. “I want to stay as Adrien. I don’t care if I get wet.”

“Where are you going?” asked the black kwami. By now he had reached the top of Pont d’Arcole and was starting to walk on the Quai aux Fleurs.

“No idea. I’m going with the flow.”

“Okay... I don’t really like this. You risk being akumatised.” Plagg sighed loudly. “I hate getting wet, but can’t allow a butterfly to hit you. I’ll keep guard here in your hair; *please* come to your senses, kid.”

Adrien gave Plagg a thankful smile and carried on walking. When he reached the Pont de l’Archevêché, he looked around as if waking up from a daze and noticed Marinette’s bakery far in the distance. He winced. He didn’t want to pass in front of the bakery and risk being seen. He didn’t have the right frame of mind; all he wanted was to be alone, to walk and think. He sighed and turned purposely in the opposite direction from the bakery, taking the Quai de la Tournelle. He folded his arms behind his back and meandered aimlessly around, watching with interest the many boats moored at the quay, until his attention was taken by one boat he knew very well.

The Liberty stood between two other boats, its purple and blue hull lit up by the light coming from its circular windows. Curious, he walked in front of it and took a sly peek, trying to see if he could spot Luka or Juleka and say hi. Probably they wouldn’t even recognise him wet as he was, he mused, but it didn’t hurt to try.

“*He winced. He didn’t want to pass in front of the bakery...*”

It *did* hurt to try, because there, inside one of the rooms, which Adrien knew was Luka’s, stood Marinette. Adrien’s heart went into overdrive. He wasn’t ready to face Marinette, not after what Kagami had said. He still needed time, time to think and digest the overload of information that he had been given. He made to move away, but for some weird reason his feet didn’t seem to listen to his brain, and he stood still, snooping inside the boat window from a distance.

Moving slightly to the right, he saw Luka’s bed, and Luka sitting on it with his legs crossed and his guitar in his hands. He saw Marinette looking quite agitated. She said something which he couldn’t hear and smiled at Luka; a fake smile, one of those smiles that don’t have any happiness in them. One of those smiles that he had mastered the execution of in the years of home-schooled loneliness, living inside his golden cage. He was wondering why a person as sunny and as generally happy as Marinette should be displaying such a hard smile, when he saw tears rolling down her cheeks and Luka stood from his bed, dropped his guitar and ran to give her a hug.

The pang in his gut and the taste of bile he felt in his mouth caught him completely and utterly unprepared. And so did the feeling of rage that nearly overwhelmed him, his hands closing into fists, and his fists shaking at the very sight that unfolded in front

of him. Luka tilted his head and moved closer to Marinette's face, in what undoubtedly looked like a kiss. He couldn't be sure of it, obviously, as all he could see was the back of Marinette's head, but he could make a pretty educated guess. The corner of his eyes began to sting painfully and his throat clenched as if someone was wrapping it in a firm hold. He couldn't breathe and his racing heart didn't help, placing itself right into his throat again.

"Cataclysm!" he heard Plagg mutter from behind his back. He turned around in time to see something burn to ashes.

"An... akuma?" he asked Plagg. The sound of Plagg's 'aha' made his heart sink. "Thank you, buddy." He moved his hand where he could feel Plagg and gave him a quick scratch on the chin, earning a loud purr from his furry friend. The purr was somehow cathartic and helped him calm down his bruised heart. He made sure to not take any more glances towards the window; he didn't want to see anything worse than what he had already seen and attract another butterfly. Thinking about it, he reached for the inside pocket of his shirt and took out a soggy slice of Camembert, which he passed on to Plagg, to help him recharge.

"Ew... I'm not eating that..." moaned Plagg. "You better get a grip, kid. Or get me a dry slice. Soggy cheese is disgusting."

Adrien shrugged. "Sorry Plagg. I don't know what came over me."

"You don't know, you say? I think you *do* know, kid..." Plagg said mockingly.

His sarcasm didn't really help. Adrien pouted and dragged his moping self a bit further away from the Liberty, trying to get out of the view. The last thing he wanted was for Marinette to see him and realise what kind of mess he'd become. Nope. He slumped himself on the ground, sitting at the border of the quay like he had done that afternoon sharing ice cream with Kagami. Oh Gosh, had it been only that afternoon? It felt like a century before. The pavement was soaking wet, and so were his jeans, and at this point he was sure that even his boxers were sharing the same fate. His bum felt wet and cold... but he didn't care.

He stared for a long time at the air in front of his eyes, not really looking at anything. He knew that Marinette was with Luka. He had already seen her crying that very afternoon. Then why this feeling? Why the burning rage, why the unbearable hatred towards one of his best friends? Because he realised that had he had Luka next to him at this very moment, he wouldn't have been very friendly with him. The rage he felt inside his

gut was almost feral and was burning across his very being. He felt his eyes filling with tears and didn't do anything to stop them, allowing them to run freely down his cheeks.

"Ah... human jealousy," said Plagg drawling his words. "I will never understand it. My suggestion, kid, is to get yourself some well seasoned cheese."

"I'm not jealous!" shouted Adrien, and then jumped at the sound of his own voice. He didn't mean to be this loud. He glanced nervously at the Liberty, but nobody seemed to have come out. "I'm not jealous," he repeated, in a low hiss.

"Paw-lease..." was Plagg's snarky reply. "Can you stop lying to yourself? This is getting ridiculous. Do you want to become an akuma magnet?"

Adrien wiped his eyes with the back of his hands and sniffed loudly. "Why does it hurt so much, Plagg?"

Cautiously, Plagg looked around and came out of his hiding place, daring to fly quickly in front of Adrien's face and took a good look at his chosen. "Wow, you're a real mess."

Adrien winced. "Thanks for that. I know. I don't need anyone pointing it out."

"To answer your question," he said, his electric green eyes peering deeply into his soul, "it hurts because you keep lying to yourself."

Adrien broke eye contact with his furry friend and looked down at his hands. Cold drops of rain from his soaking wet hair were falling down his temples and cheeks, up to his already soaked neck, causing him to shiver. He was going to say something back, but Plagg zipped back into his clothes at such speed that Adrien was left confused and a bit anxious. He turned around and saw someone he would never have expected to see, especially while in such a state.

"Hi, Adrien, are you okay?" Wayhem crouched to his knees and frowned at him; he too looked as soaked as Adrien felt himself to be. "You're the last person I would expect to see sitting down in the rain looking miserable."

"Uh..." he started, cursing internally at how groggy his voice sounded, "I'm just... I got caught in the rain with no umbrella, nothing major." He reached for the nape of his neck with his right hand and smiled nervously.

Wayhem smiled back a sad smile. He sat down next to Adrien and put a hand on his shoulder. "Drenched to my underwear myself, as you can see. And not by accident."

He sighed. “You may think it’s silly to get this worked up because of a girl, but I’m not a model like you.”

Adrien wiped his nose with the back of his hand and turned towards Wayhem. He gave him a curious look and smiled at him a bit more warmly. “I’m a good listener, if you need it.”

“Ah, no!” Wayhem put his hands up. “No need to bother you with my problems, I’m not important!” Then he must have taken a good look at his face, because his frown widened and he added doubtfully, “To be completely honest, and I’m sorry if I offend you or something, you don’t look 100% either. And it’s not just the wet clothes.”

Adrien winced. The last thing he needed was for his breakdown to be featured on the internet, and he would be totally screwed. “If I told you it was just the rain on my face, would you believe it?” Adrien laughed a sad laugh when Wayhem shook his head. “Well... then I suppose my reputation will be destroyed, because I can’t think of any other excuse.”

Wayhem laughed wholeheartedly. “Who do you think I am? Yes, I posted that picture of you online that time, but I would never betray your trust like this. Your secret is safe with me. I won’t tell a soul.” He made the sign of zipping shut an invisible zipper over his mouth.

“Tell you what,” Adrien said as he pulled his legs up and stood from the ground, helping Wayhem to do the same immediately after. “You tell me yours and I’ll tell you mine.” He showed him his hand to shake. “Deal?”

“Deal!” Wayhem’s smile was like a gift.

They started walking on the quay, moving away from the Liberty, towards Notre Dame. They were walking for a while when Wayhem finally started to talk. “It’s about a girl,” he said and sighed loudly. “She’s new to your fanclub and looks up to me as if I’m some sort of celebrity myself, only because I have your email address and I have spoken to you a couple of times. She... I thought that she didn’t like me at all.”

“What do you mean?” Adrien felt Plagg shifting behind his neck and a couple of freezing drops of rain fell from his hair onto his shoulders. He shuddered.

“Well you see... she gets all flustered and tongue-tied in front of me. She can’t say two words together and always comes up with the funniest blabble.” Adrien nodded

“*The last thing he needed was for his breakdown to be featured on the internet...*”

at Wayhem's description. "So I thought she was intimidated by me, since I'm a senior member of the fanclub, and I did my best to put her at ease. But the more I tried, the more she got flustered."

"I know the exact type. There's a girl in my class that is like that. I too thought that she hated me. We started off on the wrong foot." Adrien sighed thinking of his first day in school, and of Marinette finding him messing with chewing-gum where she was meant to sit. "So why did you find yourself under the pouring rain and not by accident? Did she set you up?"

"I know the exact type. There's a girl in my class that is like that."

"Oh no... you see, I thought she hated me, but instead it came out today that she loved me. That's why she got so flustered and tongue-tied. Turns out that if girls are shy, they can have this reaction sometimes to the one they love."

Adrien gasped loudly and grabbed Wayhem's arm. "Say that again?"

"What part?" asked Wayhem warily. "If a girl is shy she can get flustered and tongue tied with the boy she loves!"

"Did... did this girl get flustered with anyone else?" Adrien's heart was going a thousand miles an hour. If what Wayhem said was true...

"No, obviously. That was the biggest clue I should have had. She was shy only around me." He laughed nervously and then looked at Adrien and put a hand on his shoulder. "Are you okay? You look pale."

Adrien took a big breath and faked a model smile. "Yes. Carry on."

"Well... today she actually managed to gather some courage and told me that she liked me, that she had liked me for a long time. I was shocked," Wayhem said. He looked at Adrien nervously. "I wasn't ready for such a surprise. I told her that I needed to think about it and the disappointment I saw in her face broke my heart. I didn't want to hurt her." He sighed as he continued, "So I decided to have a walk under the rain to gather my thoughts and decide what to do."

"Funny," muttered Adrien. "That's the same thing I did. But my story is a bit more... embarrassing." He rubbed the nape of his neck with his right hand. "I will tell you. But honestly, if it comes out, I'm dead meat, so I would really appreciate your support in this."

“As I said, I’m taking this conversation to my grave. Hand on heart.” He put his hand to his chest and blushed slightly. “I’m really thrilled that you trust me enough to tell me something embarrassing about you. I would never dream to break your trust.”

Adrien smiled his model smile again. “Okay... you see, I’m an idiot.” He blushed profusely. “Remember the girl I told you was all flustered in front of me?” Wayhem nodded. “Well... She was the very first friend that I made on my own, and I was trying so hard to safeguard and protect our friendship that I ended up ruining everything.”

“Is she not your friend any longer?” asked Wayhem, a confused frown furrowing his eyebrows.

“No, she is... but I pushed her away for so long, and friendzoned her so strongly that she must have given up on me and has a boyfriend now.” It took a lot out of Adrien to say the last bit. He felt again the taste of bile in his mouth and gulped awkwardly.

“Happy life then. This way she will be happy and you will have one less problem.” Wayhem shrugged, probably unable to understand what the issue was.

Adrien sighed again. “*I’m* not happy, and *she* doesn’t appear happy either. And that’s what’s wrong. I... I don’t know what to do.”

“Doesn’t sound very embarrassing at all... you’re just confused.” They had nearly reached the Trocadéro. Adrien saw Wayhem turn around and start walking back and he mentally thanked him. It was time to walk back or they would have gone too far.

“I think I’m jealous,” he admitted finally.

“So you *do* love her?” That was the million euro question, Wayhem.

“*I think* so. I-I saw her kissing that boy a moment ago.” He looked down at the pavement in shame. “I’m still trying to recover from the sight.”

Wayhem stopped and started looking a bit awkwardly between Adrien and the street they had just passed by. But then he clenched his fists and gave Adrien a decisive look. “If you like her, fight for her!” He raised one fist to the sky. “Talk to her, explain to her how you feel. My girl had hesitated talking to me because she was afraid I would reject her. Knowing that you’re a supermodel and have thousands of fans, maybe this girl feels the same. She doesn’t want to ruin the friendship she has with you and prefers to give up on you. God knows that my girl told me she was nearly doing the same with silly old me...”

“You’re not silly, Wayhem,” Adrien said decisively. “You’re a good person.”

Wayhem smiled. “Thank you. You don’t know how much your friendship means to me.” That said, he raised a hand in a farewell gesture. “This is my turn by the way, it’s time for me to go home. Good luck with the girl and remember... if you need someone to talk to, I’m around.”

Adrien waved back and resumed his walk under the rain. He walked some more and then lazily slumped down again, sitting once more on the border of the quay. If Wayhem was right, he had even more things to think about before heading home. But as he looked up at the Parisian sky now pitch black against the city lights, he realised that if he didn’t go home quickly, his father would unleash a whole squad of police officers to look for him. He couldn’t help himself, though. Too many things had happened recently, starting from one of the worst akumas they had to fight against, Master Fu releasing guardianship to Ladybug, Marinette’s tears and sadness he had witnessed just a few hours before...

Hang on a second. He gasped and cupped a hand on his mouth. If Wayhem was right... and Kagami was right... Marinette’s tears today were... HIS OWN fault. He had nobody else to blame. He looked at his right hand and, with a decisive gesture, slapped his own cheek firmly.

“OUCH,” he muttered to himself. As he did so, he heard a choked giggle coming from behind him. For some reason the rain wasn’t hitting his face and hair any more, but he wasn’t under cover. He turned around to see what was going on and his heart stopped.

Marinette stood behind him, a black umbrella in her hand, her arm stretched to cover him with it. “Why would you slap yourself?” she asked. No tongue-tie. His heart sank into the Seine. Was he too late? After all she’d been kissing Luka earlier. Was she crying because of him? Because he had been sharing an ice cream with Kagami? Because... *Oh shoot.* He had asked Marinette for love advice about Kagami a couple of months back. And she had been so nice to help him even then... he turned around to look at her and her eyes grew wide.

“Adrien, what happened to you? You’re soaking wet.” She offered him a hand to help him up and looked at him worriedly. “Come in, I may have some prototype of my designs I can lend you. They may not be exactly your size, but at least they

would be dry.” He saw the concern in her eyes, her voice finally putting together more than two words one after another in front of him. He wished someone would punch him without holding back.

“I’m sorry,” he said listlessly and looked down.

“About what? Don’t stand there soaking wet, come with me. The bakery is over there.” She pointed towards the bakery, which he realised now was just across the road from the place he had been sitting. No wonder she had seen him and decided to offer her help. There goes his chance of not being seen and keeping his meltdown a secret.

What an idiot...

His heart was racing again in his throat and he felt himself shaking from tip to toe. He didn’t know if it was his anxiety or the fact that he was freezing cold because of being wet under the rain.

“Are you okay, Adrien? Your eyes are red.” She gasped in shock, not realising that her eyes were also red. He knew why they were — due to the tears she had shed because of him. But now wasn’t the time to drown in self-pity. She was so pretty; she had her hair down for once, and her dark hair framed the porcelain skin of her face creating a beautiful contrast of colours. Her bluebell eyes seemed to shine brighter than usual under the black umbrella.

Come to think about it, he thought he recognised that umbrella.

“No, I really am sorry, Marinette. I didn’t want to make you cry,” he managed to say, but he had to lower his gaze. He couldn’t hold hers.

“*His heart was racing again in his throat and he felt himself shaking from tip to toe.*”

“Uh,” she gasped. “You didn’t make me cry.” She laughed nervously and blushed. “What made you think that you did? That’s just silly!” She looked as if she was cringing internally as she said that.

“I saw you today when we ate the ice cream. You were crying when you went to sit near Luka. And just a little while ago... I was walking past the Liberty and I saw you by accident in Luka’s room. And you cried again. I’m sorry.”

“Don’t think about it. It’s not your fault, I wasn’t crying because of you.”

He grabbed all his courage and looked at her. “Yes, you were,” he said, taking firm hold of the hand she wasn’t holding the umbrella with. “It took me too long to realise it, Marinette, and that’s why I’m saying that I’m sorry.”

Marinette’s eyes widened. “Realise... what?” she murmured.

He gulped awkwardly and gave her a sheepish look, his gaze softening as his eyes met hers. He felt all blood rushing to his face as he said it, breathlessly, “I love you.”

His tone was so low that he was afraid she wouldn’t hear it, but the second he’d said it, Marinette’s eyes grew as wide as saucers and she visibly paled. Then, her beautiful bluebell eyes filled with tears. She dropped the umbrella, and he managed to catch it just a second after she let it go. He held it in between them, making sure to cover Marinette well, because there was no need to cover him. He couldn’t get more soaked than he already was.

“Say that again?” she whispered, her voice shaky and coarse. A beautiful blush dusted her cheeks and was making her freckles even more evident on her nose.

“*A beautiful blush dusted her cheeks and was making her freckles even more evident on her nose.*”

He moved closer, but tried to leave little distance between them to not soak her. She got even closer and smiled shyly at him. His heart was racing so madly in his chest that it felt as if it wanted to come out. He felt dizzy, lightheaded and hyperventilating. His gaze met hers and held it for a very long moment.

“I love you, Marinette Dupain-Cheng. And I’m sorry for having taken so long to realise it.” He looked down. “I’m sorry I’m too late.”

She grabbed both of his hands and held them with hers, so that they both held the umbrella firmly in between them, as the wind picked up and made them shiver. “What d-do you m-mean, you-you’re la-late?” His gaze ran to meet hers again, as she said so. She blushed deep red. “I... lo-love y-you t-too...” Now it was his turn to widen his

eyes in pure and utter shock. Wayhem and Kagami were right! “I-I’ve been in love with you for a very long time.”

He dropped the umbrella and squeezed her in a tight hug. With the corner of his eye, he saw the umbrella get caught in the wind and billowed away into the sky. He panicked. “Uh... I’m sorry, I didn’t mean to lose your umbrella.” Then he felt her shiver in his hold and realised that he was soaking her through. He tried to pull away, but she hugged him closer.

“Please don’t move,” she whispered. “I have waited for this moment for so long.”

He hugged her tighter, tilting his head to look at her briefly in the eyes. Then, he looked away as he admitted, “I thought I’d lost you. I thought you chose Luka.”

She sighed in his arms. “I was close.” She moved only enough to raise her head and look at him. “Luka was there for me and consoled me when I needed support. He...” She looked away briefly, but her gaze locked onto his again as she continued, “... really loves me. But he knows that I love *you*. Recently I was trying to let go of you, because I thought you were happy with Kagami, and I grew closer to him. But Luka and I just had a discussion; he could see that I was still thinking of you. He... told me he can wait, but that he wants me to think only of him if I decide to choose him. And I... wasn’t ready to do that, yet. I don’t think I ever will, now.”

He leaned slightly to say in a shaky whisper into her ear, “I saw you kissing him and I must confess that it nearly broke me.”

She gasped, telling him disapprovingly, “I *wasn’t* kissing him. If you’re talking about the moment after I started crying in his room, he hugged me and came closer to me to talk to me and reassure me. He never kissed me.”

He blushed profusely. “I’m sorry...” he muttered, but she smiled a soft smile and took hold of his chin, forcing him to look at her.

“Oh my God,” she said cheekily. “Were you jealous?” She chuckled when she saw him nodding slowly. “I would never have thought the day would come that Adrien Agreste was jealous of plain Marinette Dupain-Cheng.” She chuckled again.

“You’re not plain, Marinette. You’re amazing!” He saw her smile widen and he smiled back as he continued, “If you need me to repeat it endlessly, I’ll do it. You’re amazing, gorgeous, creative, passionate, always ready to help everybody, and so full of talent. I would be a fool if I didn’t love you, Marinette.”

He saw her eyes filling with tears and her lower lip starting to quiver, and he couldn’t resist. He tilted his head and firmly, removed all gaps between them. He felt her gasp when their lips met, but she didn’t try to wiggle off or break the kiss. In fact, she started kissing him back.

“I’m sorry about your umbrella,” he whispered breathlessly when they finally tore apart gasping for air. He rested his forehead on hers and cupped his hands on her cheeks, looking at her softly.

She flashed a cheeky smile. “That was *your* umbrella, actually. You gave it to me the day I fell in love with you. I don’t need it anymore now; I have *you*.” That said, she kissed him again. And nothing else mattered in the world.

THE END



Story Prompt Challenge

Looking for inspiration? Try these prompts and tag [@adriennettezine](#) on Tumblr.

Michel Dupain-Cheng enjoys the adrenaline of street car racing. After a blazing encounter with the ruthless Hawk Moth, Michael takes Adrien Agreste, a newcomer to street racing, under his wing. Michael's younger sister Marinette likes Adrien as well. Neither of them realizes he's an undercover cop, and Michael and his rival Hawk Moth are both the prime suspects in a case involving dirty money, big-rig hijacking, and stolen goods.

A Date to Remember

by: Maggie

BETA: Charcoalhawk and The Irish Artist

Marinette and Adrien are young, attractive and talented, but their lives are so hectic with work that there's no space for love. When they meet at a speed dating event neither wanted to attend, sparks *do* fly... just not the right kind...

“Wait up!” Marinette hurried after her best friend. Maybe her choice of stiletto heels wasn't the best after a long workday. “Come on, spill! Where are we going?”

“I told you, it's a surprise,” Alya laughed, slowing down a little. “Come on. We'll be late!”

At 22, Marinette Dupain-Cheng already had a moderately successful online fashion store, but she wanted more. She intended to break into *haute-couture*, rub shoulders with the best designers, present her collections at the world's Fashion Weeks. She already had one foot in the door after being selected for an internship at Tikki Fortunata's fashion house, but that wasn't enough. She needed to stand out and get her creations in the couturier's next collection. That meant working long days at the studio and most of the night on her store orders. And yet, whenever her best friend asked for a favour, she had a hard time saying no.

Still laughing, Alya hooked Marinette's arm on hers as they walked into the Grand Paris Hotel, rushing towards the lifts. More well-dressed young people were going up to the terrace bar, but when Marinette gave her an inquisitive look, Alya replied by locking her lips with an imaginary key.

As soon as the lift doors opened, Marinette saw the banner for the event.

Welcome Singles!
Fashionably Date
A speed-dating event organised by Lovefinders Ltd.

“Oh no!” Marinette walked back into the lift, shaking her head. “No way! Nope! Uh-uh!”

“Oh, come on, Marinette, don’t be a spoilsport!” Alya protested, grabbing her arm to pull her to the side.

“You know I don’t have time for this! I’m exhausted and hungry and I have a commission to finish by tomorrow!”

“Okay, I’ll come clean,” Alya confessed. “My editor wants me to write a piece about dating in the digital age, and they gave me a research budget!” She made a praying gesture, complete with a pout and kitten eyes. “Please help your BFF! It’s my first big assignment for the magazine, and I *really* need this!”

Marinette could never resist her kitten eyes, even though they had got them into enough trouble in the past.

“Alright, I’ll go! You owe me big time, though!”

“Who knows? Maybe you’ll meet your soulmate!” Alya teased, blinking exaggeratedly. “Then you can thank me at your wedding!”

With a disbelieving snort, Marinette gestured to the bar.

“Come on, before I change my mind.”

“Nino... I said I wouldn’t do this!”

“Come on, bro. We need to get you laid.”

“You’re one to talk, DJ Celibate!”

“Hey! I’m... waiting for the right girl to come along. Who knows if she’s up there right now?”

Adrien reluctantly stepped out of his sports car, waiting for Nino to get out to lock it.

“Only desperate losers who can’t get dates any other way come to these things.”

“That’s us, last time I checked!”

“I’m a famous model,” he said, jokingly striking a pose. “I can get any girl I want! Models, actresses, heiresses...” he counted on his fingers.

“Then why *don’t* you?” Nino chuckled.

“Erm... I have my standards,” he answered, turning more serious. “All these girls turn into someone else the moment they hear my name. They only want to date me for my money and my famous father.”

“That’s why these things are cool, dude,” Nino said, throwing an arm over his shoulder as they walked to the lifts. “We use false names during the speed date and only give out our personal information if we like the other person.”

“I think I’ll wear these anyway,” Adrien put on his usual paparazzi decoy: a pair of wraparound sunglasses, designer beanie, turned-up collar and hair tied in a short ponytail. “If I’m lucky, no one will recognise me.”

Fame was a double-edged sword for Adrien Agreste — he had every toy and gadget he wanted, a luxury loft apartment and all the money he could spend, but his face was so recognisable that he could hardly set foot outside without being mobbed by fans.

His father was the famous fashion mogul Gabriel Agreste; Adrien himself the face of the brand since his early teens. Ever since his mother Émilie had died in a freak accident, Gabriel became reclusive, paranoid and security-obsessed, ruling over his business and household with an iron fist. He was overprotective and had his son home-schooled up until University, only allowing Adrien to go out for photoshoots and the elitist extracurriculars he imposed.

As a result, Adrien didn’t have many friends, except for the children of some of his father’s business associates and a cousin who lived in London. When he met Nino at the public school where his fencing team trained, they started talking about music and movies and had been inseparable ever since. Sometimes, though, his *bro* came up with surprise parties and convoluted schemes to find him new friends or dates, and that’s how he found himself about to meet a bunch of strangers in a hotel bar on a Friday night.

“I just want to see you happy, Adrien.”

He knew Nino was serious because he used his name instead of ‘dude’ or ‘bro’.

“I know, Nino... thanks. You’re the best friend ever.”

“I am, ain’t I?” Nino removed his red cap to wipe his forehead as they went into the bar.

“Welcome to Fashionably Date!” The shrill voice of the announcer startled Marinette. “Our first speed-dating event for the Parisian creative community! As you know, we carefully handpicked everyone in this room for this occasion. Still, you’re free to write an alias on your name tags for privacy!” There was a rustle as everyone filled their labels. “Now, ladies, please take your seats. The gentlemen will circle from table to table and spend five minutes with each of you. No phones please! At the end, you can exchange contacts with the people you liked...” She waited for every girl to be seated, then shouted, “HAVE FUN!”

“Being the CFO of a major marketing agency is stressful, but worth it.” Marinette tried to hide her disdain as the professional-looking man bragged, ostensibly twirling a Mercedes car key. “I have a pretty sweet lifestyle...”

“Oh, you, like, look familiar! Do I, like, know you?” Adrien looked around, gesturing for the girl to lower her voice. “Let me guess... you’re, like, one of those Instagram influenzas, right? That’s, like, so cool!”

“Yeah, my podcast about artisanal beer has 34 subscribers now!” Marinette nodded as she heard the bearded, bespectacled hipster, pretending to be interested. “I’ll be raking in that *estampilles.com* money soon!”

“My mother signed me up for this,” Adrien had to lean in to hear the intellectual looking girl’s admission. “I’m actually in a secret relationship with my Philosophy professor.”

“Well well, what do we have here? This one looks more promising!” Marinette thought as the good-looking blond man approached. He was very tall, so he sat sideways on the chair, legs crossed to the side.

“Hi!” She tried to smile, but a mix between a sigh and a yawn came out instead.

“Hi.”

Silence. She looked at his name tag.

“Chat Noir? Like the cabaret?”

He looked up at her, but the sunglasses made it difficult for her to read his expression.

“Yes... Lady... *bird*?”

Marinette yawned as she adjusted her own tag. “Call me Ladybug.”

“Hm.”

More silence. At the next table, Alya was chatting and giggling with a cute boy. *“At least someone’s having fun.”* Marinette yawned again.

“This one’s cute!” Adrien thought as he observed the girl across from him. *“And intelligent! She looks so bored, though!”*

“Call me Ladybug.”

He felt his phone vibrating in his breast pocket.

“Hm.”

He looked over at Nino, who seemed to be hitting it off with a gorgeous red-haired girl. He side-eyed her — he felt he had to look out for his best bro, since he’d recently had his heart broken by some Italian exchange student.

“So... what do you do for a living?” the Ladybug girl asked him, yawning once more.

His stupid phone would not stop whirring.

“Erm... fashion. Excuse me.”

The good-looking man took out his phone and tapped the screen a few times, leaving Marinette feeling ignored.

“I don’t think we’re supposed to use our phones.”

The man held a finger up as he tapped frenetically.

“Emergency,” he replied dryly after a couple of minutes.

“Oh, a *fashion emergency*?” Now she was fuming. How *rude*! “What? Someone had a wardrobe malfunction and you’re the fashion police?”

“Fff— Nathalie, don’t do this to me!” He said mostly to himself, as Marinette just watched. Trying not to get too irritated, she stood up.

“Excuse me, I need to use the restroom.”

Chat Noir guy was still typing away as Marinette stood up. Walking past him towards the bathroom, she didn’t see his feet stretched out and tripped on them, then fell to the floor with a loud “eep!”

Alya was next to her in a flash, as well as the cute guy she was flirting with. It took a bit longer for the blond man to offer his hand to help. Mortified, Marinette just rushed to the restroom, planning to remain there for the rest of the evening.



“It’s the last time you drag me to one of these things, Nino!” Adrien said as soon as they were alone.

“Well, if I play my cards right, I won’t need to attend one of these any time soon!” Nino sighed with a dreamy expression on his face. “I think she liked me!”

Annoyed as he was, Adrien couldn’t help but be happy for his friend.

“So tell me, what’s she like?”

Nino gushed about his date all the way home. She was a journalist, she loved music, movies and dancing, and had even seen him DJ at a club once.

“Oh, and the cute girl you tripped up is her best friend!”

“I did no such thing! She wasn’t looking!”

“Anyway, you didn’t like her?”

“She was pretty— beautiful even... but she was a bit bland. She yawned a lot as if letting me know she was unimpressed.”

Nino laughed as Adrien stopped in front of his building.

“I thought you *wanted* to go unnoticed, dude!”

“Ha-ha! So, are you gonna call your new girlfriend?”

“Better than that! We have a date tomorrow!”



“Oh, come on, he couldn’t have been that bad!”

“Okay, one: he didn’t even take his hat and sunglasses off. That’s fishy. What’s he got to hide? A hangover? Is he a criminal? Worse, a comb-over? *Very* suspicious!”

“Hey, I thought *I* was the investigator between the two of us!” Alya laughed as they waited for the métro. “Is there more?”

“Two, he just... slouched there. So improper! Like he was doing me a favour to grace me with his presence. Pompous ass!”

“Well, Nino — who, FYI, is his BFF — said he had to drag him tonight so maybe he wasn’t at ease.”

“Three, he was texting on *my time*! That was so rude! And he had the nerve to say it was an emergency!” Marinette was red from huffing now. “And to top it all, he tripped me when I went to the loo!”

“Come on, Marinette, he didn’t *trip* you!”

“He did, too! He left those stupid long legs in my way.”

Alya laughed again.

“I’m sure he didn’t just leave them there on purpose!”

Enjoying the banter, Marinette upped the drama, leaning the back of her hand on her forehead.

“Poor, innocent me! I even heard him laughing evilly when I fell on my butt!”

“Well, you’ll have to get used to him!” Alya said between laughs.

“Me? Why?”

“Because I have a date with Nino tomorrow! And if it goes half as well as tonight, I expect it to be the first of many!”



It turned out she was right, as her relationship with Nino evolved from casual to serious in just a few weeks. Marinette had never seen Alya so in love, and was truly happy for her sake — and yet, she wondered whether she would ever find a love of her own. Not that she begrudged her friend’s evident happiness, but her loneliness was exacerbated by Alya’s constant gushing when she saw her, and by missing her when she didn’t.

To ward off those thoughts, she dedicated herself even more to her internship. If she didn’t have many chances of meeting someone before, now it was even worse, with her non-existent social life.



By the time Alya’s birthday came along, only a couple of months later, Nino took it upon himself to organise a surprise party for her. He reserved the VIP room at a club he worked for, did the decoration and hired a band for the evening, while Marinette and Alya’s sisters took care of the food and drinks.

When Alya arrived with Nino, she was appropriately surprised, although she did have some suspicions. Even so, it was the best birthday party Alya had in her adult life — The club was fantastic, the band rocked, the food was plentiful and yummy, and the alcohol flowed freely.

Determined to make Alya’s night unforgettable, Marinette led their old girl squad to the dance floor, after drinking just enough to let go of any inhibitions. They danced their hearts out until the music slowed down, leaving her to dance on her own as the others paired up or sat down.

Out of the corner of her eye, she noticed one of Nino’s friends watching her intently. Emboldened by the attention and encouraged by the alcohol, she swayed provocatively as she slowly danced her way towards him.

Recognition hit her when she was a few metres away — famous celebrity/model/idol Adrien Agreste. Marinette turned around and tried to backtrack, but sadly, poor lighting plus high heels plus too many margaritas intensified her trademark clumsiness, and she began to plummet to the ground. Everything was happening in slow motion, as she closed her eyes and braced herself for the impact — which did *not* happen. At the last millisecond, a pair of strong hands captured her waist and helped her to return to an upright position with a dancing flourish.

Still reeling from the near fall, Marinette held on to her saviour and let him guide her in a slow dance as the music faded into a romantic song. Feeling too mortified to face him directly, she hid her face on his shoulder.

“I’m sorry—I-I’m so clumsy!”

“Don’t worry, clumsy-girl,” the man said in a low, amused tone. “I don’t think anyone else noticed your *faux pas*.”

Her embarrassment levels went through the roof when she lifted her eyes to find Adrien Agreste looking back at her.

“Th-thank you.” She hid her face again.

“No worries,” he dismissed with a cheeky smile. “I’m used to having pretty girls fall for me, but this is ridiculous.”

“I didn’t—”

“I’m joking...” He laughed. “I’m only joking!”

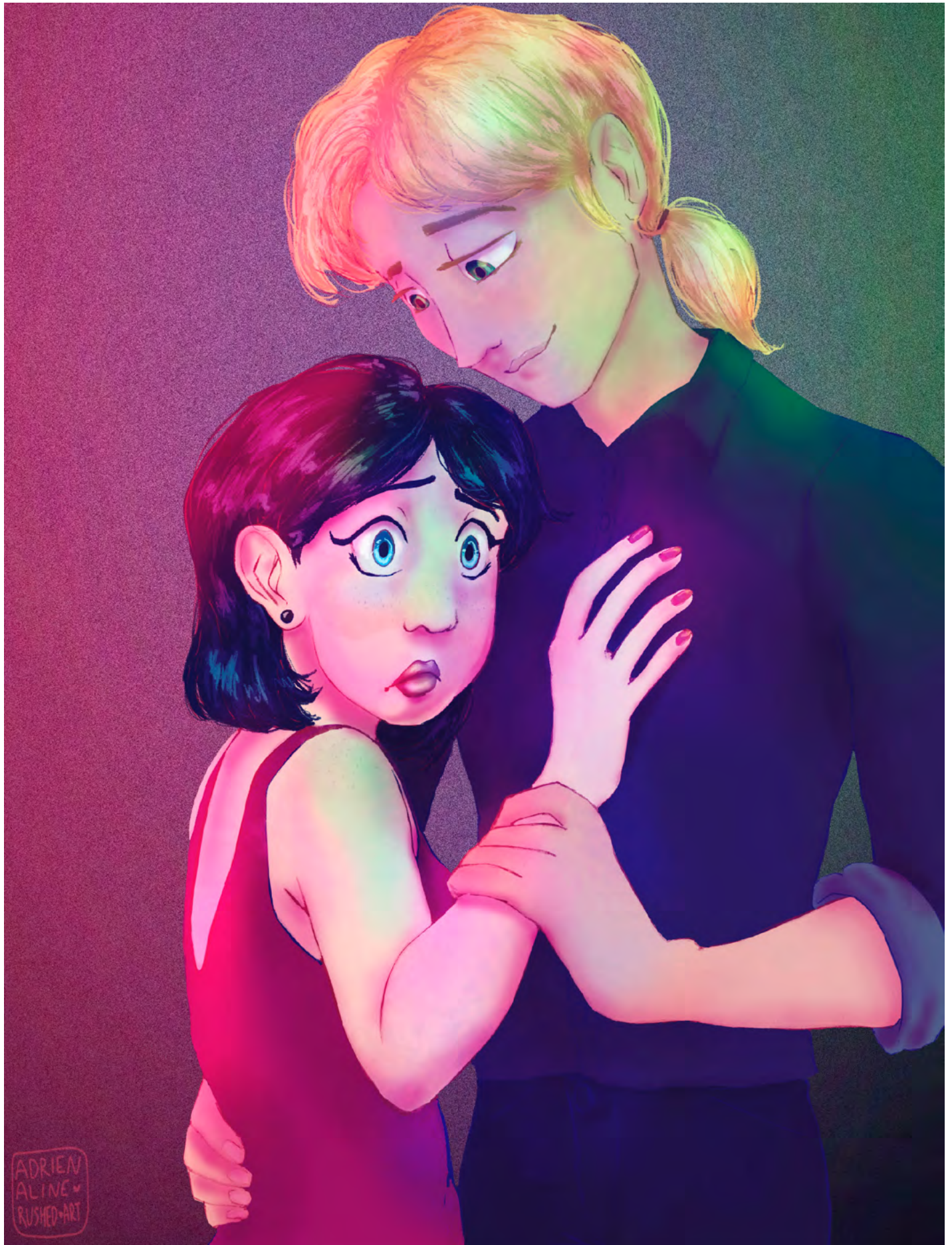
His voice sounded familiar, but she couldn’t quite place it. After all, the fashion cutouts that used to adorn her walls didn’t speak. They danced in silence for a few seconds, while Marinette waited in vain for her heart rate to go down. When the song ended, he offered a cheeky yet studied grin as their bodies parted.

Marinette looked up to meet his eyes, and it suddenly clicked.

“Wait... are you... the guy from the speed date? The pom— I mean— the Chat Noir... guy?”

“Adrien. Call me Adrien. And you’re the... ladybug, aren’t you?” He offered his hand for her to shake, with a cute little bow. “Mademoiselle?...”

“Ma-Marinette.” She felt her face flushing as she shook his hand. “Just Marinette.”



A Date to Remember · Adrienaline_rushed_art

“I believe I owe you an apology,” he looked away as he scratched the back of his neck nervously. “For what it’s worth, it really *was* an important matter.”

“Oh?”

“My... *employer* can be very persistent when I don’t answer the phone.”

Marinette didn’t recall seeing his face on billboards lately, but she knew from gossip magazines that he still worked for his father.

“I can certainly relate to that.”

“Well, Marinette,” Adrien said as he pointed at Nino and Alya, still dancing close together and laughing as they whispered in each others’ ears. “I have a feeling those two are absolutely, sickeningly in love... which means we’ll have to get along somehow.”

She nodded in agreement as she looked at the pair, barely noticing Adrien was still holding her hand.

“Truce?” Adrien smiled, squeezing her hand again.

“Hmm...” Marinette smirked and squeezed back. “I guess I’ll think about it!”

She could feel his eyes on her as she walked away, her heart still beating way faster than she would have liked.



After another stiff drink, Marinette pried Alya away from Nino and dragged her into the ladies’ room, locking the door behind them.

“When were you going to tell me the speed date guy was Adrien Agreste?”

“Ow-ow-ow, Marinette!” Alya wrestled her arm away from her firm grip. “That hurt!”

“I’m waiting?”

“Girrl, I thought you knew!” she replied, her words a little slurred from the champagne.

“*Obviously* I didn’t!”

“Well, *you* were the one who plastered your walls with his face,” she teased with a cheeky smile. “You should have recognised him!”

“Uh-uh, don’t pin this back on me!” Marinette wiggled her finger in front of Alya’s nose, making her cross her eyes. “That was years ago. Just a-a... teen heartthrob thing.”

“Yeah, right! Your heart wasn’t the only body part that throbbed when you looked at those photos.”

“Alya! It was for my *fashion*!”

“I would say they were *very* inspiring.”

“Stooop!”

“They certainly awakened *something* in you, wouldn’t you say?”

“Shut up!”

The girls were both giggling now. Alya always found a way to make her laugh away her worries.

“You...” Alya said between laughs. “You really didn’t know it was him?”

“No, I swear!” she sighed. “I barely saw his face that day. He was wearing sunglasses and a stupid beanie and texting the whole time. Besides,” Marinette looked away. “He’s not exactly a teen heartthrob any more. He’s a *man* now.”

“Oooh, I like where this is going...”

“He’s a fine, *manly* man now, you know?”

“Hmm-hmm?”

“Then again, he was pretty rude the other day.”

“Go on?”

“But he was nice tonight.”

“I bet.”

“Alya...”

“I didn’t say a thing!” She closed an imaginary mouth zipper.

The two went back to the party laughing uncontrollably.

“When were you going to tell me the speed date guy was Adrien Agreste?...”

A few weeks later, Marinette was called up to her boss's office. Sitting in the waiting room, she fiddled nervously with the hem of her skirt, wondering what in the world Tikki could want from her. The dandyish personal assistant, a soft-spoken middle-aged man who always wore green, didn't give her any details.

Tiziana 'Tikki' Fortunata's short and skinny figure belied the true force of nature within. Nobody knew exactly how old she was — it felt like she'd been around for ages. Having started in a tiny seamstress shop in the outskirts of Milan, she worked her way up the tough ladder of the high fashion industry, winning awards and recognition wherever she presented her work, and eventually establishing her world headquarters in Paris.

"Ah, Mlle. Dupain-Cheng..." Tikki smiled from behind her large executive desk as the assistant let Marinette in the eclectic atelier. "You've been causing quite a stir in the designers' office."

“*The small chair she sat on made her feel like a child sent to the principal's office.*”

Having only met her boss briefly at the internship interview, Marinette was baffled to find Tikki even knew who she was. The small chair she sat on made her feel like a child sent to the principal's office.

"A-a stir?"

"Hmm-hmm..." the older woman swiped a red curl off her forehead to tuck it behind her ear as she examined a portfolio. "The senior designers have an ongoing pool on which of the trainees will get a permanent job at the end of the internship, and you are the favourite by far."

"I-I am?" Marinette felt her face flush. "I mean, I've been working hard, but—"

"Now, now, don't be modest, sweetie." Tikki took off her eccentric red reading glasses and looked her in the eye. "You've been tireless in your assignments, your seamstress skills are way beyond your peers, and you've even helped your senior designers with their work."

Tikki stood up from her chair and walked in front of the desk to lean against it.

"That's why I have an important assignment for you." She picked up another folder and handed it to Marinette.

“As you know, we joined Gabriel Fashion for an affordable *prêt-à-porter* collection.”

“Oh yes, I’ve handled some of the samples...”

“I know, dear.” Tikki leaned into her personal space to whisper in her ear. “I know *everything* that goes on in this building.”

As Marinette recoiled in surprise, Tikki giggled in her high-pitched voice.

“Anyway, as you know, I designed some pieces for men, which is Gabriel’s speciality, and he designed pieces for women, which is mine.”

Marinette flipped through the folder, appreciating the sketches.

“This is amazing, Madame—”

“Oh no, dear, please call me Tikki, I insist!” She giggled again as she returned to her seat. “Your very special assignment is tomorrow’s photoshoot.”

“To-tomorrow?”

“Tomorrow morning at six, Place des Vosges. Don’t worry, it’s easy enough,” she dismissed, pointing at the folder. “All you have to do is help the model with the clothes and accessories, and confirm every outfit matches our lookbook.”

“So... I’ll be a dresser?”

“Exactly. See? You’re halfway there. Now, my main concern is Gabriel Agreste — if we’re not careful, he will fiddle with *my* designs just to make *his* look better.”

“He would actually *do* that?”

“You’d better get used to it — fashion is a dog eat dog business, and Gabe is a sly old mutt...” Tikki grinned mischievously. “But I’m older *and* smarter than him!”



Marinette set three alarms on her phone that night, fearing she’d oversleep, yet remarkably, sprang out of bed as soon as the first one sounded. This mission was a unique opportunity for her. Would she get to meet Gabriel Agreste himself? It was unlikely, as he was famously reclusive, but she could hope, right?

The crew was already setting up when she got to the photoshoot at the Place des Vosges, even though it was well before the scheduled starting time.

There were workmen, assistants, interns and all-around noise and bustle. In the middle of the chaos, the photographer was growling orders at the technicians who were putting up lights, reflectors and umbrellas.

“Come on people. I don’t have all day! We need to be done with the shoot before it rains!” He turned to a young boy, likely an intern. “Where’s my breakfast? You know I don’t get inspired until I get my camembert sandwich.”

Marinette followed the intern’s steps to the catering cart and poured herself a double coffee, before returning to the bustling set. She finally saw a familiar face, one of Tikki’s project managers, who was wheeling a clothes rack into a tent.

“Good morning Ziggy!” she called out as she approached her. “Where do you want me?”

“Oh, Marinette, thank goodness you’re here! Help me out with these.”

The two set up the dressing room in a short time. Inside the tent, the photographer’s angry grumblings were still clearly audible.

“Bit of a temper, huh?” Marinette whispered to Ziggy.

“When you’re the celebrity fashion photographer Plagg Roquefort you’re allowed to have a temper,” she sighed. “He’s a softie at heart, though, according to Tikki.”

“That’s a relief,” Marinette said as she recalled her boss’s reference to a dog eat dog world. She’d better get used to unpleasant people.

“We’re all set now,” Ziggy dusted off her hands. “Now, you know what to do, right?”

Nodding, Marinette started counting off her tasks.

“Make sure the model wears each visual in the same exact way our lookbook shows; steam or iron out any wrinkles; pay special attention to the accessories.”

“Excellent!”

Outside, M. Roquefort was still shouting abuse at the workers.

“I’d better go appease the talent—” Ziggy sighed, opening the tent curtain. “Oh, our model is here!”

Marinette looked where Ziggy was pointing, and her jaw dropped when she saw who the model was. Repressing a squeal, she started to zip around in an attempt to look busy and not flustered at all.



“You know I could drive myself to the shoot, don’t you Nathalie?”

Adrien slumped into the limousine seat where his father’s assistant was waiting. She rolled her eyes but kept a stern expression.

“And you know your father,” she removed her glasses and pressed her fingertips to her eyes. “It’s an important shoot for the brand, he wanted to make sure everything is under control.”

“Control being the keyword here,” he yawned. “I’m tired of being treated like a child.”

“Parents always think of their offspring as children, no matter how old they are.”

“Tell that to my fourteen-year-old working self.”

“Now, then,” she avoided the subject by passing him a tablet with the day’s schedule. “I just got a text from the photographer; the shoot’s been moved up by thirty minutes due to weather conditions.”

“I know, it’s supposed to pour later, but worry not. I’m armed!” Adrien grinned, brandishing his umbrella like a sword in an attempt to lighten the mood. Perennially serious, Nathalie simply ignored his antics.

“That PDF has the lookbook for the visuals you’ll be modelling today. The female model is Daizzi Paradis, you’ve worked with her before, remember?”

“Oh yeah. She’s a sweetheart.”

“Hmm. She’s one of Tikki Fortunata’s regulars— Oh, we’re here,” Nathalie announced, swiftly exiting the car. “Everything looks ready... You should get to the tent.”

“Aye, aye, Captain!” Adrien said as he gave her a two-finger salute. “Can I get some coffee first?”

“Yes, but please hurry,” Nathalie dismissed as she dashed to help soothe the annoyed star photographer who was yelling for his sandwich.

Taking a deep breath, Adrien took a moment to put on his earbuds and pull up a comedy podcast on his phone. It was part of his pre-shoot anti-stress ritual — while laughing to himself might look odd, the endorphins helped relax his facial muscles and the distraction tuned out the chaotic energy around him.

He managed to keep a straight face as he got his coffee from the catering cart and got his hair and make-up done, but by the time he walked into the dressing room, Adrien was laughing out loud and even tearing up a little.

Which was probably the reason he didn't see the girl scurrying around the tent until he bumped into her mid-laugh, spilling his still hot coffee on them both.

"Oh, crap!" She cried. "Hot! Hot!" She blabbered as she sprang back.

"Oh no, I'm sorry, are you okay?" Amidst his excuses and her yelps, Adrien recognised her. "Marinette? How— Let me—"

“*... he bumped into her mid-laugh, spilling his still hot coffee on them both.*”

Her top was drenched, while Adrien only got a few drops on his blazer. He thanked his lucky stars he'd decided on a lot of creamer that day, so the coffee wasn't boiling hot.

"Hot!" she cried, starting to peel off her soaked and sticky sweater.

Meanwhile a panicked Adrien quickly got a towel and a bottle of water from an ice bucket.

"Ow—ow—" Marinette whined as she stripped down to her bra.

Adrien doused her torso with cold water and assessed the injuries. As far as he could tell, there were red spots on her skin, but no signs of severe burns. He plunged the towel into the ice bucket, wrung it and started patting her chest with it.

"I—I think you'll be okay," he said with a relieved sigh.

"Thanks." Marinette looked down, then at him, then opened her eyes wide.

It took them a moment to realise the delicate situation they were in— namely, when Nathalie and Ziggy ran into the tent, alarmed by the commotion and bombarding them with questions and worries.

Adrien froze in place, his hand still pressing the cold towel to Marinette's bust. As he noticed the looks they were getting, he clumsily hung the towel on her shoulders and jumped a few steps back.

"I— I spilt coffee— I was just helping—"

"He ran right into me— it was so hot— my clothes were all—" Adrien and Marinette blabbered at the same time.

Without wasting any more time, Nathalie's cool efficiency and Ziggy's friendly helpfulness quickly resolved the situation. Adrien was directed to the changing room to change into his first look of the morning. In turn, Marinette applied some ointment Ziggy found in a first aid kit and put on a spare man's shirt Nathalie produced. It took only a few minutes to get back on track for the shoot.

When Adrien came out from behind the curtain, Marinette was standing in the middle of the tent, holding the lookbook. She was wearing an oversized white shirt with rolled-up sleeves and cinched at the waist with a belt, face still flushed and hair pulled up in a bun and just the prettiest girl he'd ever seen.

"Hu-hum," he coughed lightly to get her attention. "I'm ready?"

When she looked up at him, he could swear her cheeks reddened a little more.

"Um—" she looked back down at the folder, flipping the pages until she found the correct design. "We need to adjust a few things," she added in a cold, professional tone.

She moved close to him and propped the folder on a table so she could use it as a guide, and started fiddling with the jacket lapels. Then she took two steps back and gestured for him to spin around.

"Oh. This is wrong," Marinette shook her head, stepping close to him again. "The belt must be clearly visible."

Adrien was sweating now, as she unbuttoned the jacket and tucked the shirt into the trousers so that it would be snug against his torso. He had been touched like this numerous times in his career, but had never felt so flustered about it. This time it felt like her fingers were giving him tiny electric shocks with each touch. He could feel her breath through his shirt and smell her perfume, mixed with the aroma of the coffee he had spilt.

It was a relief when she stepped back again, only to pick up a lint roller and start walking around him dabbing it on his clothes. When she got to the bottom of his trousers, she made a disapproving click with her tongue and knelt down.

“This hem is crooked,” she explained as she looked up at him, then took a pin from the cushion on her wrist and adjusted it.

“What the hell is wrong with me? Calm down. It’s just a run of the mill fitting before a shoot,” Adrien told himself. He could feel tiny beads of sweat forming on his forehead.

“There! All done!”

Marinette smiled for the first time that day, a small, business-like nicety that was probably meaningless. Adrien made a mental note to try and make her smile more.

“Adrien!” Nathalie popped her head in the tent, startling him back to reality. “Everyone’s ready for you. Come along.”

“Huh-huh,” he replied eloquently, before strutting out to the set.



Just outside the dressing tent, Marinette took a deep breath as she watched the model walk up to the shoot.

“I did it! He looks perfect! The look is perfect of course.”

Her rambling thoughts reviewed the events of the morning, leaving her with reddened cheeks and an uncertain smile.

Sure, accidents *do* happen, but she’d heard Adrien laughing just before he bumped into her. She didn’t want to even consider the thought of him doing it on purpose, but something about the incident was bothering her. He looked apologetic enough, and was kind and helpful, but still...

She stepped closer to the set to get a better look at the models. The model Adrien was posing with was tall, lean and beautiful, all legs and arms and long red hair and pouty lips. Between poses the two models chatted vivaciously, the girl giggling at his jokes. Marinette felt her heart flutter a little as she watched them.

“Silly Marinette, stop daydreaming. He’s way out of your league, you’re just a lowly intern,” she told herself, shaking her head and going back into the tent to prepare the next look.

The rest of the day went smoothly compared to the early morning, and they were able to get all the shots done before it started raining.

By the time Marinette finished packing up the garments, Adrien had removed his makeup and excess hair products and changed back into his own clothes.

“So... Uhm... thanks for your help today,” he began, awkwardly scratching the back of his neck. Marinette turned around to face him.

“Just... doing my job,” she replied with a forced smile.

“Sorry again for the coffee—”

“Forget about it,” Marinette dismissed, knowing she would definitely *not* forget about it. Especially the part where he saw her half-naked and patted her chest with an iced towel. She turned around and started rearranging random objects to hide her blush.

*“Silly Marinette, stop daydreaming.
He’s way out of your league,
you’re just a lowly intern...”*

“I’d like to make it up to you,” Adrien insisted. “We could get something to drink?”

“Thanks, but I-I have to go back to work.”

“Okay,” he replied, sounding a little dejected. “See you around?”

“Hmm-hmm.”

Marinette saw him leave the tent out of the corner of her eye, then waited a few minutes to go out. She stretched a hand out of the canopy to check how hard it was raining. It was pouring now, and she didn’t have her umbrella, so she pulled up the hood of her trench coat, ready to run to the nearest métro station when she noticed Adrien still standing there.

“Hey,” he said, as he opened his umbrella and stepped out from under the canopy, before turning around to face her. “I just wanted you to know that the coffee, erm, thing, it really was an accident, I swear. I’m so sorry.”

Unsure how to react, Marinette just stared at him.

“Then I panicked and I... I know I overstepped, with the towel and everything, and I put you in an awkward position—”

“No worries, it wasn’t even that hot!” She interrupted, averting her eyes as she recalled her impromptu strip session. “I wasn’t thinking straight, either.”

“I’m just not... very good with these things, you see, I’ve never had many friends. Especially *girl* friends. This is all sort of new to me.”

Adrien offered her his umbrella with a pleading look, his green eyes almost fluorescent in the dusk. Their fingers touched as she reached out to take it, sparking a shock that spread from her fingertips all the way down to her toes.

With a nervous but determined smile, Marinette took the umbrella and stepped closer to cover them both.

“So... about that drink?... Raincheck?” Adrien asked in a low tone.

“Ra-rain check? I-I mean, it’s raining now I guess, I—” Marinette took another deep breath to stop herself from rambling, “*silly me, quit stammering like a thirteen-year-old with a crush!*”

“Turns out I don’t have to go into work after all,” she managed in a controlled tone. “We can go now if your offer still stands.”

“*I’m just not... very good with these things, you see, I’ve never had many friends. Especially girl friends.*”

Marinette had seen Adrien smile many times in person and in photos, but she’d never seen him smiling so brightly. It made her heart skip a beat or three.

“Of course it still stands!” He offered his arm for her to hold. “We can go right now.”

She returned the umbrella and linked her hand around his arm, drawing very close “*because of the rain, of course,*” she rationalised as she cuddled into him.

As they walked briskly across the park to get a taxi, Adrien paused for a moment and stared into her eyes. “You know what? I believe this could be the beginning of a beautiful friendship.”

.....
One year later
.....

She definitely had too much to drink tonight. Not a lot, but still, she stumbled a little as she worked her way through the crowded club. She smiled to herself. “*Funny, the last time I was here I—*”

Just as she was approaching her group, Marinette tripped on her own feet and began to fall, only to be stopped by a familiar embrace.

“Careful now, my love,” Adrien said. “A bruise would spoil the photos tomorrow.”

“I think I jinxed myself. I was thinking about the last time we were here.”

“Hmm, yes,” a mischievous smile played on his lips. “Funny how you keep falling for me.”

“Funny how you’re always here to catch me, my prince.”

“You’re right where you’re supposed to be, my princess.”

Adrien pulled her closer and kissed her tenderly. When she threw her arms around his neck, he lifted her to his eye level.

“In my arms, forever.”

“You’re so mushy,” she kissed him again. “I love it!”

“Come on, we were waiting for you.”

“What for?”

Adrien guided Marinette by the hand until they were in the middle of the dance floor. All the colourful lights went off, except for a spotlight over them. An electronic remix of the nuptial march began pumping on the speakers, and Nino’s voice cheered.

“Let’s hear it for the bride and groom!”

The crowd whooped and applauded, dancing to the rhythm of the song. Then Nino switched to a slow tune and turned the volume down before handing the microphone to Alya.

“Hey everyone, just a little word before they kick us out. There are a few things I’d like to share with you tonight.”

There was a small applause before she continued.

“I’ve known Marinette for almost ten years now, and I’ve never seen her so happy before...” she was visibly moved. “I am so thankful to have you in my life, even at times when you’re a headstrong, klutzy, rambling mess.”

A collective giggle caused Marinette to hide her face on Adrien’s chest. But Alya wasn’t done yet.

“Have you ever heard of a meet-cute? Well, these two have had a meet-disaster,” Alya continued after the laughter died down. “Actually, they annoyed each other for a while before they became the most sickeningly loving couple they are today... I mean, joint bachelor and bachelorette party? Who does that?”

“You did, just a couple months ago!” Adrien shouted from the dance floor, causing another laugh from the audience. Alya waved him away.

“Yeah, yeah, anyway, I’ll leave the first date story for *tomorrow’s* toast. Right now I’ll just ask you all to raise your glasses to the bride and groom!”

The crowd cheered when the couple kissed, Adrien dipping Marinette with a dramatic flourish. He picked her up bridal style and carried her out of the club as she waved.

“I can’t wait to be your wife,” she said as soon as they were alone.

“Just a few more hours, my love,” he kissed her again as he set her back down on the floor. “Then I’ll be all yours.”

THE END



Story Prompt Challenge

Looking for inspiration? Try these prompts and tag [@adriennettezine](#) on Tumblr.

After Adrien's mother disappears, his father tightens up. In doing that, he neglects Adrien, but Natalie and Leonard(Gorilla) are there. His life is far from perfect or happy. Adrien never got to go to school. He meets Marinette through MechaStrike3, and they become friends. One of the few outings Adrien gets to meet Marinette and tell her of his situation. He tells her emancipation is the best way, but there is no other way unless he gets married after all his research.

Marinette wants to help, so they go and explain the situation to her parents. Her parents understand and are onboarding. Marinette, with her parents, helps get Adrien the help he needs. How will life be now that Adrien is on his own and married?

The Perfect Present

by: Apopcornkernel

BETA: MOO

On their first anniversary, Adrien finds
the perfect present for Marinette.

It was a bright, sunny day in Paris. Everything seemed well. And yet a certain Adrien Agreste was utterly, hopelessly lost.

“Ack— so sorry!”

Adrien winced as the middle-aged man he had bumped into glared at him, the man rubbing his side and turning on his heel to walk away without so much as a word in response.

Adrien hadn’t seen him coming, distracted as he was. Which had led to that accidental crash.

Plagg cackled from the inside of his jacket. “Nice job, kid. First you couldn’t find a present. Now you can’t even find your way!”

Adrien sighed, dragging a hand through his golden locks. (Somewhere in the distance a fangirl squealed.) “Don’t remind me, Plagg,” he mumbled glumly, looking so unlike his usual, cheerful self.

And it was all Marinette’s fault.

... Okay, maybe he shouldn’t have worded it that way. She’d probably smack him senseless if she heard him say that.

At the thought of that, a small chuckle escaped Adrien’s lips. Yep. Definitely should’ve worded it differently. It was a good thing she couldn’t read his mind.

Anyways, what he'd *meant* to say was, it was all because he still couldn't find a gift for his and Marinette's anniversary. Today marked one whole year they'd spent together.

One whole year with her—in and out of the mask. One whole year enjoying her warm presence and her soft kisses. One whole year filled with so much love he felt his heart was overflowing.

It was just too bad that he'd probably end up late to their anniversary date later. Because he just couldn't find the perfect gift to give her. And heaven *forbid* he show up present-less!

"Hey! Watch where you're going, young man!"

Adrien jerked out of his thoughts, surprised—

—just in time to avoid walking straight into a lamp post.

Oops.

"Ah. Didn't see that..." Adrien turned around, rubbing his neck sheepishly. His eyes landed on a woman who stood at a sidewalk kiosk. She was the only person who was still around—the man he'd bumped into earlier was long gone by now—so Adrien assumed it was she who had warned him.

Adrien walked up to her, smiling gratefully. He tried to ignore the soft, muffled laughter coming from his jacket. "Thanks for warning me, ma'am," he said.

"You should always stay alert. Especially out on the streets!" The woman's scolding tone made him cringe in shame. "That would've been the second time you'd gotten bumped! Get your head out of the clouds, for goodness' sake."

"Sorry, ma'am," he said meekly. He struggled to ignore his kwami's steadily increasing laughter once again.

"Well, you've avoided that particular disaster now." She fixed him with a serious stare. "Just be more careful next time."

Adrien swallowed, feeling a little intimidated. "Yes, ma'am—"

He could scarcely get the words out before she interrupted him. "And stop with that 'ma'am' nonsense. Call me Simone."

“Okay, m— Simone.” Adrien smiled. “I’m Adrien.”

Thankfully, Plagg seemed to have gotten his laughter under control by that time. Adrien didn’t think he could’ve restrained himself from snapping at Plagg if the kwami had continued chortling so raucously.

Simone returned his smile. “Nice to meet you, Adrien. Now, may I interest you in some umbrellas?”

Adrien perked up. “Umbrellas?”

“Yes, umbrellas.” Simone waved a hand over the colorful array splayed out neatly on the counter, settling easily into a cheery, customer service persona. “We’ve got compact ones, automatic ones, and the more old-fashioned ones. In nearly every shade of the rainbow!”

Adrien’s eyes roamed, dazzled by the sheer variety of hues and patterns and types. He’d never expected *umbrellas* to be this plentiful in designs. Which, in hindsight, was a little stupid. If there were a million different pairs of shoes, why wouldn’t there be umbrellas?

Simone kept up a running commentary as he surveyed her collection of wares. “That one hasn’t ever been tried out by any of my customers, which just blows my mind! It looks old, but it’s a really good umbrella. Sturdy, too.”

Adrien nodded, humming thoughtfully. Could he maybe find a present for Marinette here? After all, they’d first become friends under the shelter of an umbrella.

Simone chattered on, pointing out and remarking on different umbrellas. But Adrien was already drifting away, lost in a vividly remembered memory. One that he felt he could never possibly forget.



The sound of rain reverberated in his bones. The thick, roiling clouds smothered the sun to a distant flicker, shrouding the school steps with gloom.

And yet nothing could have detracted from the glow of this newly forged friendship.

His umbrella abruptly closed over her head, showering him with stray droplets of water. Startled laughter escaped his mouth. When she peeked out from underneath, cheeks flushed in embarrassment, he thought, somewhere in the back of his head, that she looked cute.

“Oh, that one! That’s got really good sun protection. You could go into the sun with only that as your shield and survive.”

Adrien jolted, Simone’s energetic voice pulling him back to the present. He looked down to see his hands had landed on a plain black umbrella. Simple, unassuming. And rather similar to that same umbrella he’d given *her*, on that fateful day that seemed to be lifetimes ago.

He looked up, and laughed at the playful smirk on the woman’s face. “Into the sun? Have you got any testimonials?”

“Well, Adrien, you could always be the first,” Simone shot back, grinning.

That made him grin back. “Can I at least try it out before I attempt to go sun-diving?”

“Normally I would say no, but...” Simone shrugged. “Today’s been a slow day, business-wise. So sure. Go ahead.”

Adrien beamed. “Thanks!”

Reaching down, he plucked the umbrella from the counter, taking a moment to feel its weight in his hands. It was a standard style umbrella, long and slender and starkly black. Much like the one he used to own. Much like the one he’d given Marinette.

“*He looked down to see his hands had landed on a plain black umbrella. Simple, unassuming.*”

Adrien couldn’t help the soft smile that came to his lips at the fond memory. Even after all these years, he still felt so much warmth at the mere thought of that particular moment.

Plagg shifted inside his overshirt, and Adrien shook his head in a tiny motion. It wouldn’t do to keep drifting off. He was here to search for gifts, not daydream.

Simone raised an eyebrow, noting his sudden smile and abrupt silence. “Well? What are you waiting for?”

“Ah, sorry!” Adrien fumbled for the latch, pressing gently on the little button as he opened the umbrella.

It unfolded easily, the mechanism obviously well oiled. It unfolded the way a ladybug's wings did—and to his surprise, it had the colors to match, inside.

“Oh— it's red...” was his half-dazed response.

The design immediately brought to mind Ladybug—black and subtle red much like her colors. (Except Ladybug's red was *nowhere* near as subtle as that.)

He could practically hear Marinette's tinkling laugh as she flicked his bell, her mask-covered face lined with a soft look that could reduce him to a puddle. Could practically feel the sharp, fleeting pain of her jabbing her elbow into his stomach, all because he'd cracked another horrible pun. Could practically see the fiery determination she wore on her face like a second mask—one that set his heart ablaze.

He might have gotten lost in yet another daydream, had it not been for the interruption that was Simone's worried voice.

“*The design immediately brought to mind Ladybug...*”

“Is that meant to be a good thing, or a bad thing?”

Adrien's eyes widened, his head whipping sideways to find Simone frowning, her eyebrows furrowed.

“No! No, I just— What I meant was, it looks good!” Adrien hastily said, trying to reassure her. “I just didn't expect it to be red. Reminded me of something.”

Simone smiled teasingly, now that her concerns had been alleviated. “You mean someone? Mmm... Ladybug, perhaps?”

Adrien flushed. “N— no,” he stammered. “Of course not.”

Simone let out an unbelieving laugh. “Suuuure.”

Adrien spluttered. “It's not what you think! I— I have a girlfriend!”

She raised her eyebrows. “Oh, really?”

He nodded emphatically. “Yep. She's actually why I'm out shopping.”

“Fine, fine. You win.” Simone rolled her eyes. “Is it her birthday today? Anniversary?”

Adrien nodded again. “Today's our first anniversary.”

“Ah, I see.” A fond smile graced Simone's lips. “Young love. How sweet.”

Heat crept up the back of Adrien's neck. "Th— thanks?" he said with uncertainty.

Simone laughed. "It's a shame there aren't more of your kind. The world would benefit from a good dose of pure goodness."

Adrien raised an eyebrow. "I know a lot of good people—people who are even kinder than me. Are you sure about that?"

"Well, perhaps you're right. Perhaps." Simone sighed. "It's getting rather late. I don't suppose you have an anniversary dinner with your young lady?"

Adrien's eyes widened. Oh, crap. "What time is it?" he asked anxiously. He'd accidentally left his phone behind at the mansion.

Simone chuckled. "Late, for sure. Here, let me bag the umbrella—"

An almighty clap of thunder let loose, cutting Simone off. And then, immediately after, a deluge of biting rain came crashing down from the heavens.

Adrien thanked his lucky stars that he stood under her kiosk's overhang.

"I guess you won't need to wrap that up anymore," he said, with a rueful smile. "Thanks, Simone. How much?"



After a quick exchange of coins, and a promise to visit again, Adrien finally left for Marinette's, feeling the rain slam against the umbrella's fabric like liquid bullets. He hoped Simone's umbrellas were as sturdy as she had looked.

He also hoped Plagg's bad luck wouldn't rub off on him on the way home.

By the time Adrien finally arrived at Marinette's, gift in tow, he was nearly fifteen minutes late for their anniversary date.

They hadn't planned anything fancy—although Adrien would've *loved* to go all out for her—so he didn't have to worry about a change of clothes. Which was relieving... because Adrien, though shielded from the worst of the rain by the umbrella, had mud splattered over his sneakers and ankles. Some of the mud was even splashed onto his shirt - the work of a car that had passed him by while he had been jogging on the sidewalk. He was rather dirty, to say the least.

But Adrien refused to stop by the manor to clean himself and be any more late than he already was. So here he stood in front of the Tom & Sabine Boulangerie Patisserie, the rain thrumming against the awning above him while he shook the droplets from what was meant to be Marinette's present. Sighing, he tried to fold it as neatly as he could. Maybe he could still salvage it.

The light clicked on inside the bakery, and before he could even finish drying off the umbrella, Sabine burst through the front door, towel in hand.

"If you stay there any longer, you're going to get sick, Adrien!"

Adrien bowed his head and thankfully took the towel. "Sorry..."

But then, much to Sabine's dismay, Adrien grabbed the umbrella from where he'd put it on the counter, and proceeded to use the towel *on the umbrella*.

She stared on in stunned disbelief as the lovesick boy wiped off the last of the rain.

"Adrien..."

He looked up, all innocence. "Mhm?"

A shaky laugh bubbled from Sabine's lips. "Why didn't you use it on yourself?"

"I— Oh." Adrien laughed. "Oh yeah."

At that, she started laughing in earnest, as Adrien grinned sheepishly.

"Silly boy," Sabine chided. She reached over to ruffle his damp hair. "I'll get you another towel."



By the time Adrien had finally dried himself up, he was officially twenty-five minutes late.

He scrambled up the steps eagerly, umbrella in his grasp and heart in his hands.

Adrien could barely control his giddy excitement. It felt like how it had in the beginning—how it had felt when they'd first discovered their identities and grown ever closer in the wake of the reveal. It felt like butterflies in the stomach and pink bubbles in the air. It felt like golden light and fluffy sweet pastries and honeyed kisses.

He wouldn't be too surprised if he caught himself bouncing up and down. Excitement like this was *exhilarating*. It had been way too long since he'd felt this unique blend of anticipation, giddiness, and a little bit of nerves.

Adrien pushed up the trapdoor and peeked into Marinette's room. Distantly, he registered an annoyed, damp Plagg swooping out of his jacket as he grinned at Marinette.

"Happy first anniversary, m'lady!"

She whirled around, a smile breaking out on her face. "Happy first anniversary," she sang. Marinette stepped away from her desk and went over to him as he climbed into the room.

Before he could say another word, Marinette kissed him lightly, stealing his breath. Even after being treated to her kisses for one whole year, he still felt the fireworks that fizzled whenever she kissed him.

When she pulled away, he couldn't help but pout a little. Marinette laughed. "Later," she promised, a smile on her lips.

"Fine," he grumbled. Suddenly, he brightened, remembering the umbrella. Adrien offered her the present with a twinkle in his eye. "Here's an anniversary gift. Sorry if it's still damp... it started raining and... well, I ended up using it."

“*Before he could say another word, Marinette kissed him lightly, stealing his breath.*”

Marinette took it and let out a sound of delight. "This... it looks just like the umbrella you gave me!"

He rubbed the back of his neck sheepishly. "Yeah. Do you like it?"

Marinette grinned. "Of course, *chaton*. Thank you."

She made to pack it away, but before she could, Adrien's hands shot out to stop her.

"Wait, let me show you something." Adrien placed his hands on the umbrella, over hers. Gently, he guided her hand to unlatch the lock, then opened the umbrella, their fingers skimming over the cool metal rod as the black cloth unfurled over their heads like a ladybug opens its wings. But it wasn't *all* black, as he knew she was about to find out.

Marinette gasped. "This..."

Adrien let a small smirk appear on his face at her admiring expression. “Like it, princess?”

“Yes, I love it,” she said in hushed tones. Marinette pried her hand out from under his and touched the cloth with the tips of her fingers. It was smooth and silky to the touch. “Where’d you get it?”

“I wandered through this open air bazaar and found that.” Adrien chuckled. “Of course, the bazaar’s temporarily closed now, ‘cause of the rain.”

Marinette giggled. “At least you managed to get here fairly dry.”

“All thanks to this umbrella here,” he replied, reveling in the fond glances she threw the gift’s way. And his, too. Adrien watched as her eyes trailed over his figure, taking in his wind-tossed hair and rumpled clothes, all the way down to his muddy sneakers.

Marinette let out another laugh. Raising an eyebrow, she shot him an incredulous smile. “And yet you still got your sneakers all dirty, you dork! You’re going to get mud all over my room,” she chided, planting her hands on her hips.

Adrien smiled sheepishly. “Whoops. Sorry.”

“You better be,” she huffed. Adrien had to bite back another laugh—he could tell she was struggling to keep a straight face.

He decided to save them both from laughing fits the best way he knew how.

“Anyways...”

Adrien grinned innocently.

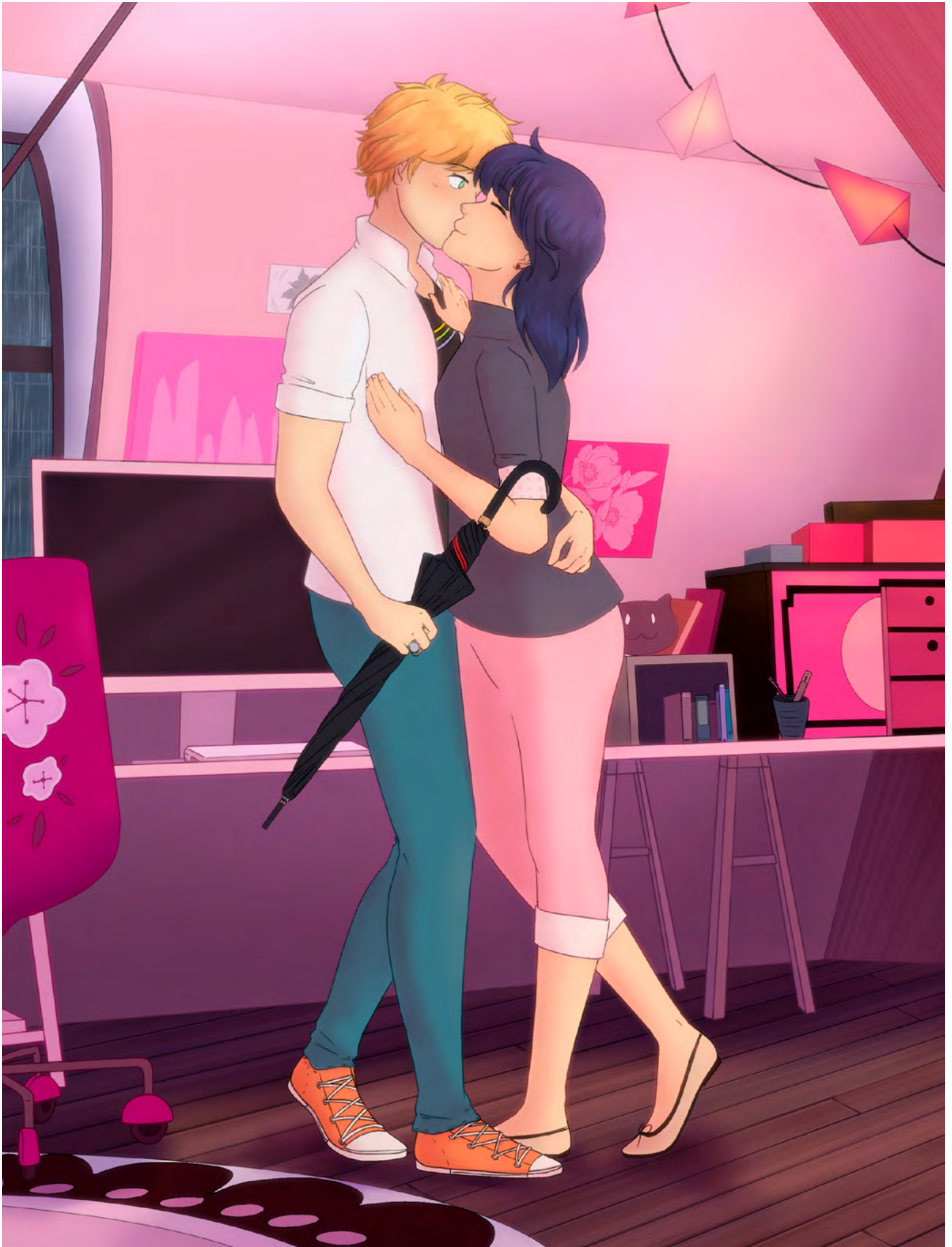
“I thought I was promised more kisses?”

Marinette blinked, disbelief painted on her face. “Seriously?”

And then she grinned, crouching down to set the umbrella on the floor as a small chuckle escaped her lips. “You’re *such* a dork, my silly kitty.”

She still kissed him anyway.

THE END



The Perfect Present • maybemochas

The Ladybug Princess

by: Trinity Rain

Marinette is a princess and Adrien is the young prince of the neighboring kingdom. Their parents have periodically made them meet throughout their lives in hopes that they'd fall in love and get married. However, the plan fails spectacularly for 16 years as Marinette and Adrien are less than amicable.

Due to Adrien going abroad for his studies, they don't see each other for six years. When he comes back and visits Marinette's kingdom, he meets a kind woman at the town square and falls in love. Lo and behold, that woman was none other than Marinette. He begins to court Marinette and is able to eventually win her heart. But the romance is cut short when an evil sorcerer kidnaps Marinette and places a curse on her. Every night, she turns into a ladybug and doesn't change back until sunrise. The only way to break the curse is to receive true love's kiss. Can she find a way to break it?

Once upon a time, there was a king named Tom and a queen named Sabine. They ruled a wonderful kingdom, yet they were sad. They wanted nothing more than to have a child to love and care for. Then, happily, a daughter was born. A princess. And she was given the name Marinette.

Royals and nobles came from all around to wish congratulations to the royal family and offer gifts to the young princess. Among them, was the widowed King Gabriel and his son Prince Adrien. Seeing the two infants together, King Gabriel, King Tom, and Queen Sabine had the same idea. Adrien and Marinette would be brought together each summer in hopes that they would fall in love and join their two kingdoms.

But unknown to all, there was another plan. The evil sorcerer Hawkmoth was a bit concerned with Odette's birth, for he was planning on taking control of each kingdom through dark arts. However, on the eve of his planned attack, King Tom and Queen Sabine's knights stormed his dark lair and destroyed it, Hawkmoth's powers plunged into darkness. Unfortunately, Hawkmoth managed to escape, leaving them with a final message: "I'm not done yet!" But the threat was soon forgotten as Hawkmoth disappeared, all hopes turned to the summer when Adrien and Marinette would meet.

On a wonderful day at the beginning of the summer, the now five year old Marinette rode on horseback with her parents to Adrien's kingdom where Gabriel and a five year old Adrien awaited.

"Hello, King Tom, Queen Sabine," King Gabriel said. "Welcome to our fair kingdom."

King Tom smiled. "Thank you, King Gabriel, you are kind as ever. And who might this strapping young man be?" He turned to Adrien, who was frowning behind his father. "Prince Adrien, I assume."

Gabriel smiled. "Yes, and welcome to you as well, young princess," he said to Marinette.

Sabine smiled down at her daughter and gently nudged her forward. Marinette looked back at her and went hesitantly.

"Go on, Adrien, dear." Gabriel said to a grumpy Adrien, nudging him as well. "Go on."

Adrien frowned stubbornly. "*Father.*"

Gabriel crossed his arms. "*Adrien.*"

Adrien sighed and trudged over to Marinette. "Hello Princess Marinette." He said monotonously. "Very pleased to meet you."

Marinette curtsied grudgingly. "Hello Prince Adrien." She said, just as monotonous as he, and when Adrien grabbed Marinette's hand and pressed a kiss to it, Marinette scrunched her nose. "Yuck."

Adrien crossed his arms and turned away, frowning back at her. *I can't believe I have to be with her all summer.*

Marinette mirrored him. *He looks conceited and annoying.*

Their respective parents motioned them to go back to each other, so they did, baring their teeth in a fake smile as they continued with the pleasantries.

“Glad you could come.” Adrien said through his teeth.

“Happy to be here.” Marinette responded painfully sweet.

The two royal children spent the summer arguing and fighting, tripping each other on the way to breakfast or getting into fistfights after accusing each other of cheating during one of their games.

Their fifth summer together started off just as badly, with Adrien and his best friend Nino throwing tomatoes in Marinette’s direction and Marinette kicking the support beam of their tree house, causing it to collapse with them in it. Marinette left at the end of summer with a broken arm, Adrien grudgingly waving goodbye with one hand as the other held on to his crutch. Their parents were not pleased.

Everyone could see that the two did not get along, but their parents were hopeful and continued to bring them together. Adrien was visiting Marinette’s kingdom when they were 14 and they both just as unamused with the arrangement. Much to Adrien’s chagrin, Marinette always beat him at cards. And much to Marinette’s, Adrien flirted with the castle guards.

“He’s so conceited and annoying.” Marinette would say.

Her best friend Alya smirked. “I think you just really like him.”

“I’d like him better if he wasn’t here.”

Summers went by all the same, with absolutely no luck. When they were 16, the plan had to be paused as Adrien went abroad to study. They stayed apart, each doing their own thing, growing into themselves separately, for six years. But that was soon going to change.



“Welcome back, your Highness.” Nathalie, the king’s servant, greeted Adrien as he got off the boat that brought him back to his kingdom.

Adrien grinned. “Why, thank you, Nathalie, it is great to see your stony face again! I presume father has plans for me?”

Nathalie looked down at the itinerary in her hands. “Yes, you will go back to the castle and meet Princess Marinette later this evening. There will be a welcome feast afterward, where your father and Marinette’s parents hope the two of you might share a dance.”

Adrien sighed. “The duties of a prince are never over. Even if they do take a six year break.” He eyed Nathalie mischievously. “Any room in that schedule for a little bit of incognito exploration of the town square?”

Nathalie kept her stony appearance, but a warm twinkle shone in her eyes. “No one is expecting you for another hour. You should probably get ready for your meeting with the princess. See you then.”

Adrien grinned. “Thanks, Nathalie!” He gave her a quick hug, donned his cape, and made his way to the town square.

The bustling streets filled Adrien’s senses and excited him. Six years was a long time to be away, but it was as if nothing had changed. The same merchants sold their goods in the same stalls, children’s laughter filled the air as always, and the town was alive.

“*The bustling streets filled Adrien’s senses and excited him. Six years was a long time to be away*”

Adrien scanned over everything, turning around to take it all in. As he walked backwards, he accidentally bumped into someone. “My apologies.”

He looked up to see a woman in a cloak, the hood up to hide her hair and cast a shadow over her face. Despite the slight obstruction of her face, Adrien could see that she was beautiful. “Well, hello, my lady. Apologies again for bumping into such a beauty.” He grinned and bowed.

The woman rolled her eyes. “Apologies accepted. Now if you’ll let me be on my way.”

Before she could leave, a little girl’s cries caught her attention. A girl about eight years old was on the ground, having tripped and dropped her basket of fruit that rolled onto the street and was trampled by a carriage. The woman approached the girl and helped her up, smiling at the young girl as she brushed dirt off of her. She bought a basket of fruit from the stand they were at and handed it to the girl.

“Here you go, little lady.” The woman smiled warmly.

The girl rubbed her glistening eyes, hesitantly accepting the basket. “I can’t pay you back, ma’am,” the little girl said.

“That’s quite alright.” The woman responded. “Think of it as a gift.”

The little girl smiled a toothy grin. “Thank you!”

Adrien watched as the child happily skipped away, the woman smiling after her. “That was very noble, my lady.”

“I didn’t do it to be noble. I did it to be kind.” She turned to Adrien and smiled. “Kindness is important, after all.”

Adrien didn’t know who this woman was, but he was immediately enamoured. “I couldn’t agree more. Please, let me treat you to a cup of tea or some other beverage.”

“I’m afraid I have somewhere to be.” She grinned. “Find another kind soul to flirt with over tea.”

She left before Adrien could say anymore, disappearing through fruit stands and into the crowd. He smiled after her. What a great way to start his life back home. He only wished he’d meet that woman again.



When he got to the castle, Adrien was whisked away by Nathalie into his room to get ready to meet with the princess. He was shepherded into a brand new tunic and cape, every bit the prince that he was, and with that, they pushed him into an empty ballroom and closed the door.

“*He only wished he’d meet that woman again.*”

“Here we go,” Adrien muttered to himself. Six years did not diminish the matchmaking drive the Kings and Queen had. He spun around when he heard the door opposite him open, ready to see Marinette again after all this time.

He first saw a black heel enter the room, followed by a light pink dress and the fair maiden wearing it. He was momentarily stunned. No longer was the young princess in pigtails that he so often bickered with, but instead a beautiful woman with much longer hair that cascaded down her back. Pink flowers were pinned to her hair, holding it back from falling into her familiar yet foreign face. She met his eyes and smiled, taking Adrien back to that afternoon.

“M-Marinette?” He slowly walked over to her, taking in the sight before him. “It was you?”

A momentary flash of confusion shone in Marinette's eyes before her face was flooded with realization. "You were the flirtatious man from the town square!"

Adrien grinned. "And you were the kind woman who gave a child a fruit basket and then turned me down. Though," he smirked, "it seems you turned me down for *me*."

Marinette rolled her eyes. "Not that I had much of a choice."

Adrien laughed. "Little Marinette may now be all grown up, but I see her sharp tongue never dulled."

"And I see that your kittenish attitude did not subside," she retorted.

"Not at all, my lady," he said, taking her hand and pressing a kiss to the back of it. "The only difference is that I have even better game."

Marinette cocked an eyebrow. "Well, I don't see myself swooning. Must not be as good as you think."

Adrien grinned. "You're not swooning *yet*. That will soon be remedied."

Marinette rolled her eyes again. "So you're going to go along with our parents' plan? Make me fall in love with you, get married, and join our kingdoms?"

"Absolutely."

"Even though it has clearly failed for 16 years?"

"Oh, come on, our summers weren't that bad. Surely you had fun beating me at cards."

"Ah yes," Marinette smiled fondly, "I did enjoy mercilessly winning and wiping that smirk off of your face."

"And surely you never truly hated me. In fact, I think you might have even had a crush on me."

Marinette laughed. "Absolutely not, that's absurd. If anyone was harboring a secret crush behind a facade of rivalry, it's you."

Adrien held his hands up in defeat. "You caught me. Despite how absolutely annoying I found you, I could not deny the attraction to those signature pigtails." He grinned as Marinette laughed, snorting as she held her stomach.

“Well, Prince Adrien. I give you permission to woo me. If you can make me swoon, we’ll call the plan a success.” She grinned.

Adrien spent the next few months courting Marinette, gifting her extravagant gifts and making her snort with laughter at his horrendous puns. As much as they fought through their childhood, they had been slowly falling in love the entire time, leading them up to this final summer. All of Adrien’s attempts at wooing payed off as Marinette eventually swooned, albeit purposefully and dramatically.

They got engaged and held a ball to celebrate, both kingdoms rejoicing in the love of their royal heirs. But the celebration turned to mourning as devastation struck.

Marinette and her parents left with their guard to go back to their kingdom to prepare for the wedding and upcoming merger. But the captain returned, bruised and injured, all alone.

“We were attacked,” he said between groans, “by a great creature.”

Adrien’s eyes filled with fear. “Marinette!”

He took the fastest horse in the stable and galloped towards the wreckage of the royal carriage. In the debris, he found the King and Queen.

“Your Majesties!” He shouted, rushing to their side. “Are you alright?”

King Tom groaned. “We-We’re fine. The creature, it wasn’t after us. It was after Marinette.”

Adrien shook his head. “Where is she?! What happened to Marinette?!”

Queen Sabine let out a sob. “She’s gone.”

“No,” Adrien whispered, eyes wide.

“Prince Adrien...” a voice called out from a wooden plank that was once part of the carriage door.

Adrien rushed to the voice to find a guard bleeding out.

“Prince Adrien, the creature. It’s not what it seems, it’s...” the guard trailed off, eyes closing permanently.

Adrien turned to the King and Queen. “Do-Do you know what he meant?”

The king shook his head. “We didn’t get a good look at it before it was too late.”

Adrien turned back to the forest, eyes searching wildly for any sign of Marinette. “Marinette...” he said softly, sobs starting to escape from his lips. “Marinette!” He screamed into the night.

Deep in the forest, hidden between the trees, stood an ancient castle with a beautiful garden, the plants bathed in moonlight. On one of these plants was a bright red ladybug, crawling around its little leaf.

Hawkmoth stood watching the ladybug. “Now, don’t let my spell make you sad, Marinette. It doesn’t even last the whole day. As soon as the moon fully bathes this plant, you’ll turn back into the beautiful princess that you are.”

“Where is she?! What happened to Marinette?!”

As he said this, the clouds parted and illuminated the ladybug in moonlight. Magic swirled around the ladybug until Marinette was standing in its place.

“You’ll have to be on this plant, of course.” Hawkmoth continued. “But as soon as the moonlight touches your wings, you’ll be human.”

“What are you doing this for?” Marinette asked, eyes throwing daggers at him.

“Well, you see, I want your father’s kingdom. I tried taking it by force once and it didn’t work out. But if I marry the heir to the throne, we can legally rule together.”

Marinette scowled. “I will never marry you!” She started to run away, but Hawkmoth’s words stopped her.

“No matter where you go, as soon as moonlight leaves the garden, you’ll turn back into a ladybug.”

Marinette’s eyes went wide. “No.”

“I’m sorry about your predicament, Marinette.”

“That’s alright, Tikki. I’ll break this curse someday.”

Marinette was in the garden on the seventh night of her capture, speaking to a ladybug on her finger. Because of Hawkmoth’s curse, she was now able to communicate with

animals, even in her human form. She made two friends, a ladybug named Tikki and a cat named Plagg.

“How will you do that, kid?” asked Plagg from where he was lounging in Marinette’s lap.

“In order to break the curse, I need to share a kiss with the one I love, and he must then make a vow of everlasting love and prove it to the world.” Marinette looked up to the moon, wondering if Adrien was looking at it from the castle.

“Marinette!”

Marinette was startled from her thoughts by Hawkmoth’s voice. She set Tikki down on a nearby plant as Plagg ducked behind a bush.

“Marinette, are you ready to change your answer and be free from my spell? All it takes is a simple word.” Hawkmoth grinned menacingly at her. “Will you marry me, Princess?”

“*In order to break the curse, I need to share a kiss with the one I love...*”

Marinette crossed her arms. “Every night you ask the same question and every night I give you the same answer. I would die first.”

Hawkmoth laughed, but there was no amusement in his voice. “You know, Marinette, you’re really starting to bug me.” He looked up to see the moon duck down the horizon. “I guess you need another day.”

Marinette looked up and gasped. As the last drops of moonlight left the garden, magic swirled around her and turned her back into a ladybug.

Adrien was in the royal library, the guard’s final words swirling through his head. “*It’s not what it seems.* What did he mean?” He searched through multiple books until he saw a page that sparked something. “Yes!”

He sprung up and gallivanted out the library, running into Nathalie. “Hello, Nathalie!”

“Hello, Adrien,” she said. “Where are you going in such a hurry?”

“To find the creature!”

“Alright, just make sure to be back for tomorrow night.”

Adrien stopped in his tracks and turned around, frowning at Nathalie in confusion. “What’s tomorrow night?”

“The ball, Your Highness. Your father invited all the eligible princesses from neighboring kingdoms to try and find you a suitable wife.”

Adrien’s frown deepened. “But Nathalie, my heart belongs to Marinette. I won’t marry anyone but her.”

“Well, it’s too late to cancel the ball. And your father would be most disappointed.”

“Fine. I’ll try to be back in time for the ball, but I won’t take any of the other princesses as my bride. I’ll humor father and attend, but that’s it. Now, if you’ll excuse me, Nathalie, I must go find a creature!”

And with that, he left the castle and went into the forest.



Marinette sat on a leaf with Tikki, basking in the sun.

“You know, Marinette, I really want you to be able to break this curse.”

Marinette sighed. “Me, too, Tikki, but how?”

“Easy,” Plagg chimed in. “All we have to do is bring Adrien to the garden at night and have you transform in front of him!”

“But how will we find our way to the castle? We don’t know where we are, we’d need a map.”

Tikki fluttered her wings in excitement. “I’ve seen a map in Hawkmoth’s castle! Plagg, do you think you can get it?”

Plagg licked his paw. “Absolutely, sugarcube.”

Not 15 minutes later, Plagg returned with the map in his mouth. “Pthu! Old maps do not taste good.”

“Thank you so much, Plagg!” Marinette flew to him and landed on his nose.

“It’s no problem kid. Now, hop on, Tikki. It’s time we get this princess to her prince.”



Adrien placed a parchment in front of Nino and Chloé, who looked down at it in confusion.

“It’s a mouse.” Nino said.

Adrien grinned. “It’s the creature.”

Chloé laughed. “A tad small, wouldn’t you say? Not sure a mouse could drag your princess away.”

“Yeah,” Adrien said, “until it changes into this!” He placed a second parchment on the desk, this time containing a drawing of a dragon. “A creature that can change its shape. A harmless creature approaches, then suddenly, it’s too late!”

“You mean, it could be anything?” Nino asked.

“Anything,” Adrien confirmed.

“Well that narrows it down,” Chloé grumbled.

Adrien smiled and stood up. “Let’s go, you two. Into the forest to find ourselves a shapeshifting creature!”

They took horses into the forest, riding until they got in deep and then going quietly on foot.

“The creature’s here,” Adrien said, “I can feel it.”

“How will you know the creature when you see it?” Nino asked.

Adrien scanned his surroundings. “I’ll know.” He took out his bow and notched an arrow, ready to fire at any time. “Keep close.”

Chloé screamed. “Ahh! There’s bugs! Adrien!”



“We’re getting close,” Plagg said.

“I’m so excited for you, Marinette!” Tikki chirped.

“Me, too! I can’t wait to see Adrien again.” Marinette smiled as she conjured a mental image of her fiancé.

“Ahh! There’s bugs! Adrien!”

Marinette turned to the direction of the sound. “That’s Chloé! Adrien is here!” Marinette flew off of Plagg’s head and towards Chloe’s disgusted squeals.

“Wait, kid!” Plagg yelled after her.

Marinette flew around trees, looking for Adrien. She finally found him and excitedly buzzed around him, the sun shining on her wings through a clearing in the trees.

“Huh?” Marinette’s shiny and bold wings caught Adrien’s attention. “A ladybug?” He watched her fly around. “It’s not what it seems... a ladybug, of course! This is for Marinette!” He lunged towards her and clapped his hands.

“*Marinette flew around trees, looking for Adrien.*”

Marinette gasped and was able to narrowly escape Adrien’s palms. She frantically flew away, Adrien close behind.

“Plagg?” She called out.

“Right here, kid!” Plagg emerged from a bush with Tikki, running alongside Marinette.

Adrien eyed the black cat. “A cat?”

“Plagg, he thinks we’re with Hawkmoth! We have to maintain our distance or he’ll try to kill us!” Marinette cried out. “But we have to stay close enough so that he will follow us to the garden.”

They continued to rush through the forest with Adrien in tow. “Alright, Princess! Let’s get your prince to the garden!” Plagg cried.

They ran and zigzagged around the forest, evading Adrien but keeping him in their wake. Finally, they made it to the garden where they ducked behind a bush, leaving Adrien to look around for them.

“Marinette,” Tikki called to her, “you have to get to the plant so that you can transform!”

“But what if I don’t transform fast enough and he kills me?” Marinette asked panickedly.

“This is your only chance!”

“Alright,” Marinette agreed. She flew over to the plant, trying not to catch Adrien’s attention.

Unfortunately, he saw her. “Gotcha,” Adrien said, inching over to her.

Luckily, Plagg came out and tugged on Adrien’s pant leg, giving Marinette enough time to land on a leaf and let the moonlight bathe her.

Magic swirled around her and transformed her back to her human self, Adrien staring wide eyed.

She smiled. “Hello, Adrien.”

Adrien breathed. “Marinette.” He ran over to her and hugged her, spinning her around.

“Oh, Adrien,” Marinette said, cupping his cheek with her hand. “I missed you so much.”

“*She flew over to the plant, trying not to catch Adrien’s attention.*”

Adrien kissed her softly and sweetly. “I missed you, too.”

“How are my parents?” Marinette asked.

“They’re okay! A little shaken up and missing their daughter, but they’re okay. Let’s go, I’ll take you to them!”

Marinette smiled sadly. “I can’t. Hawkmoth has me under a spell. Every day I turn into a ladybug and can’t turn back unless I return to this plant when the moon rises.”

“Marinette!” Hawkmoth called from the castle.

Adrien turned in the direction of his voice. “Who’s that? Is it him?”

Marinette nodded, frantically pushing Adrien back into the forest. “Yes, and he’s very powerful, so you need to go!”

“Wait!” Adrien turned to her. “How do we break the spell?”

“You need to make a vow of everlasting love and prove it to the world.” Marinette said.

“I’ll do it! I love you so much, Mari. How?”

Marinette shook her head. “I don’t know, but you have to go!” She pushed Adrien.

“Marinette!” Hawkmoth called again.

“The ball!” Adrien exclaimed. “Tomorrow night, come to the castle. I’ll declare my love for you to the entire kingdom!”

Marinette smiled. “Okay, I will. Now go!”

Adrien hurried back into the forest and out of sight just as Hawkmoth approached.

“Didn’t you hear me calling, Princess?” Hawkmoth scowled.

“I, uh,” Marinette stuttered. “No, sorry.”

Hawkmoth smiled menacingly. “Ah, yes, you must not have heard me over the sounds of your lovely reunion with the prince.”

Marinette gasped.

“*The ball! Come to the castle,*” Hawkmoth circled around Marinette. “Seems you forgot one tiny detail, Princess.” He pointed up to the sliver of the moon left in the night sky. “There will be no moonlight tomorrow. How will you go to the ball as a ladybug?”

Marinette’s hands shot up to her mouth. “No.”

“Oh yes,” Hawkmoth retorted. “I think I will send someone else in your place. Someone who can help me achieve my goals.”

He walked over to one of the many white butterflies in the garden and waved his hand over it. Magic swirled around it until it transformed into an identical copy of Marinette.

“When Adrien makes his vow to the wrong girl, you will die. And I will finish him.” He laughed.



“What are we going to do, Plagg?” Tikki asked.

It was the next night, the night of the ball, and Plagg and Tikki were outside the castle. Hawkmoth had put Marinette in a little bug cage the moment she turned back into a ladybug and put her somewhere inside the castle. He and the fake Marinette left for the ball earlier.

“Well, sugarcube, we’re going to have to find Marinette and break her out!” Plagg said.

Tikki flew onto his head and they headed inside. Plagg darted around the castle, looking into each room, cupboard, and crevice. Finally, they found Marinette on a desk in Hawkmoth’s study.

“Plagg! Tikki!” Marinette exclaimed.

“We’re here for your jailbreak! Hawkmoth took the key with him, but I can try smashing the cage open. Brace yourself, kid!” He swatted the cage onto the floor and watched it break, Marinette flying out unscathed and landing on his head next to Tikki. “Let’s get you to the ball, Marinette!”

Plagg ran through the forest towards the castle, ending up at the front entrance.

“How do we get in?” Tikki asked.

Marinette looked around. “Plagg, can you find a way to that window up there?” She motioned over to an open window on the second floor.

Plagg smiled. “I am one agile cat, Princess. I can definitely get there!”

He hopped on a ledge, to the thick vines on the wall, and lifted himself up onto the second floor balcony. He leapt through the open window and sprinted towards the ballroom.

“Everyone, I have an announcement to make!” Adrien’s voice rang from the ballroom.

“No!” Marinette cried. She flew off of Plagg and fluttered towards Adrien. She entered the ballroom and saw him with the fake Marinette, arm in arm in front of all the guests. She frantically buzzed to him, but it was too late.

“I want to make a vow of everlasting love!” Adrien cried, staring fondly into fake Marinette’s eyes. “I love Marinette and will make her my queen.”

“No!” Marinette cried, all energy draining out of her. Her wings grew heavy and she slowly fell to the floor.

“Kid!” Plagg yelled. He ran over to her and, with Tikki’s help, scooped Marinette’s frail body and placed her on his back.

Adrien smiled at Marinette. Finally, after all the tragedy, he had broken the curse and was able to be with his love.

Suddenly, the doors to the ballroom burst open and Hawkmoth entered, laughing a cold and dark laugh.

“You!” Adrien pointed a finger at him. “You have no power here! I have broken the curse!”

But Hawkmoth’s laughter only rang out louder. “Oh, little prince, you only think you have. You made a vow alright, but to the wrong girl.”

Adrien furrowed his brow. “What do you mean?” He took Marinette’s hand. “This is Princess Marinette, the love of my life!”

“Think again.” Hawkmoth waved a hand and magic swirled around Marinette until all that was left was a white butterfly. “Your princess is dying, Adrien.”

Adrien’s eyes went wide. “No.”

He looked over to where Hawkmoth motioned, seeing that same black cat from yesterday. He ran to it and saw a ladybug on its back. The cat looked up at Adrien with sad eyes and let Adrien cup the real Marinette in his hands.

“*Suddenly, the doors to the ballroom burst open and Hawkmoth entered, laughing a cold and dark laugh.*”

Hawkmoth’s laughter rumbled in Adrien’s ears. “If you hurry, Prince Adrien, I’ll let you see her one last time.”

Adrien glared daggers at Hawkmoth, but wasted no more time. He ran to his steed and galloped back to Hawkmoth’s castle with Marinette safely in his shirt pocket. “Almost there, Marinette. Hold on just a little longer.”

He arrived at the castle and ran to the garden, placing Marinette on the plant. Whether it was an effect of Marinette dying or Hawkmoth keeping his promise, magic swirled around Marinette and transformed her back into herself despite the lack of moonlight. He hugged Marinette, holding her tightly.

“I’m so sorry, Marinette.” Tears fell from his eyes and dropped onto the ground.
“I’m so sorry.”

“Adrien?” Marinette called weakly.

Adrien released her from his hug and stared into her eyes. “Yes, my lady, I’m here.”

Marinette smiled softly. “I love you, Adrien.” She groaned. “I feel weak.”

“No,” Adrien sobbed. “I love you. That vow. It was for you.”

Marinette cupped Adrien’s cheek and wiped a tear with her thumb. “I know, my love, I know.” She smiled sadly and closed her eyes.

“No.” Adrien whispered. “No!” He looked around the garden wildly. “It was for her! Do you hear me!? That vow was for her!”

“No need to shout.”

Adrien spun around to see Hawkmoth. “You!” Adrien ran to him and took hold of Hawkmoth’s collar. “Don’t you let her die! Don’t you dare let her die!”

Hawkmoth grinned wickedly. “Oh, is that a threat? Let’s see if you can follow through with it.”

He waved a hand and was enveloped in smoke. When it cleared, a great monster stood in his place.

Adrien’s eyes went wide. “The creature.”

Hawkmoth, now a wicked beast resembling a dragon, lifted his translucent wings and took flight. He swooped down at Adrien, barreling into him and scratching at him with his talons. Adrien tried to block him with his sword, getting a few good swipes across Hawkmoth’s body. They continued fighting, each one managing to injure the other, until Adrien finally thrust his sword into Hawkmoth’s heart. With a great blinding light, Hawkmoth disintegrated into nothingness.

Adrien ran over to Marinette’s unconscious body, holding her in his arms. “I’m sorry, Marinette. “I’m so sorry. I just wanted to prove my love and break the spell. I didn’t mean to make the vow to the wrong person.” He brushed her hair out of her face and placed a gentle kiss to her forehead. “I love you, and your kindness and compassion. The way that you beat me at cards and how ruthless you can be when people

wrong you. I love how skilled you are with a weapon and how equally skilled you are with your words. I love you, Marinette. Always have.”

He closed his eyes and hugged her, letting more tears fall to the ground.

“Adrien?”

He opened his eyes, filled with hope and disbelief. “Marinette?” He pulled away and looked at her, his eyes met with her own blue ones. “Marinette!”

“Adrien!”

They kissed, everything else melting away so that there was only them and their love.

Plagg and Tikki watched from the forest, smiling happily.

“Well, there you have it.” Plagg said.

“Everlasting love.” said Tikki.

THE END



Story Prompt Challenge

Looking for inspiration? Try these prompts and tag [@adriennettezine](#) on Tumblr.

Marinette is deaf, and she becomes Ladybug. She ends up being the new girl in school. Adrien is Cat Noir and is a model his father doesn't let him have much freedom. Natalie convinced his father he needed to be in school. His father let him go to school.

At school, Adrien and Marinette meet and hit it off. Adrien knows sign language and helps Marinette out in school. They both like each other, and the class can see it as well. Alya, with the help of the other classmates, tries to set them up together.

The Sleepover

by: Joelle. M

Marinette is ecstatic to have her three favourite people sleepover for a night of fun, games and laughter but when Alya suggests a horror movie before bed, Marinette doesn't want to be a party pooper, and puts up with two hours of jump scares and gore. That evening she can't sleep, and to her surprise, Adrien is willing to talk to her until she feels safe enough to go to bed.

Marinette hummed as she walked around her kitchen, making sure everything was set up the way she wanted: checking the popcorn in the microwave, setting macarons and cookies on a platter, pouring chips into bowls and lining up mini burgers on a plate, chopping up fruit and skewering them through and drizzling with chocolate.

Some people might say it was overkill for a sleepover but Marinette didn't care. With her parents always making large platters for weddings and various events, she couldn't help it. And whoever said no to more snacks at a sleepover anyway?

She checked the time on the clock in the kitchen and she giggled, the nervous energy coursing through her veins.

It was her first sleepover with Alya, Nino and Adrien together and she was over the moon that all three of her favourite people were going to be there.

She picked up a knife and began cutting into the cheese before hearing her phone go off next to her. She placed the knife down and she grinned when she saw the message from their group chat titled 'The Four Best People in School'.

Alya @ 6:25 pm
@Marinette please don't
go overboard with food like
you usually do.

Nino @ 6:25 pm
Clarify overboard?

She rolled her eyes and took a photo of all the food on the counter before sending it with a caption.

Marinette @ 6:26 pm
Too late! ;)

Marinette knew Alya loved that she went overboard but she could agree that sometimes they couldn't even finish it. Her parents were always happy to have leftovers so really there wasn't any harm done. She had to make enough to feed everyone and she would be embarrassed if her friends weren't fed while at her house. Her parents were away for the weekend teaching at a pastry workshop outside Paris and allowed her to have friends over as long as she kept the house clean.

She finished up the cheese and Tikki flew out of her blazer pocket and nodded at the food.

"Your parents would be proud," she chirped before Marinette gave her one of the mini cookies she had baked that afternoon.

"I'm their daughter and my dad would disown me if I didn't provide!" she laughed and Tikki giggled.

"Hawk Moth's been quiet for a while. Are you still going to patrol this evening?"

"I patrolled last night so I'm going to give it a miss but...if something pops up, I'll just make an excuse like I always do. Besides, Chat Noir said he would this evening, so it'll be fine."

Tikki nodded before Marinette's phone vibrated, Adrien's name popping up on the caller ID.

She gasped and hurriedly picked up, being careful with the knife in her other hand.

“Adrien! Hey!” she said, a little too loudly and she winced.

“Hey Marinette! I just need to mention that I’ll be late for the sleepover. I’m stuck in traffic and it’s really backed up,” he said apologetically.

“Oh, no problem! Just ring when you’re here!”

“Thanks for understanding! I’ll be over as soon as I can!”

She ended the call and there was a knock from downstairs. She ran down and opened the door, grinning when she saw Alya and Nino’s faces.

“Marinette! Let’s get this sleepover on the road!” Alya said wrapping her in a hug.



Two hours passed and Marinette looked at the clock in her room as Nino threw some popcorn into the air and Alya moved left and right to catch it in her mouth.

“Score!” he yelled as Alya pointed to her mouth that now had a single popcorn in it.

Alya noticed her friend’s offish behaviour and wiggled towards her and put an arm around her.

“He’ll be here Marinette. I know he will.”

“I know...I’m just worried about him. I know he was...seeing his dad today.”

Gabriel Agreste had admitted himself to a private rehab facility unexpectedly and it shocked the whole of Paris. According to Adrien as well as the tabloids, he had never gotten over his wife’s death and needed help. Adrien went to visit him every second weekend at the facility.

Marinette had never seen Adrien look so withdrawn from life which is why she organized the sleepover in the first place.

She didn’t want him to feel alone.

Her nerves stood on end when she heard the doorbell ring and she leapt out of her room, nearly falling down her stairs to get to the door. She yanked the door open and yelped in pain as it hit her face and she recoiled in pain, falling ungracefully to the floor.

“Marinette! Oh my gosh, are you okay?”

The honey gold voice made her relax and she felt his hand on her shoulder.

“Yeah, just... ow that was really sore!” she mumbled as she touched her nose gently, “I guess I was so excited to open the door that I hurt myself.”

He offered his hand to help her up and she took it.

“I’m sorry I took so long. Traffic was a nightmare and I still had to go home and pack my stuff.”

That was a lie. He had used the extra hour to patrol but Marinette didn’t need to know that.

“Well there’s still plenty of food and we were just about to start watching movies!” she said with a smile.

“Is Adrien here?” Nino asked as he ran downstairs, Alya following him and he gave him a hug.

“*The honey gold voice made her relax and she felt his hand on her shoulder.*”

“Glad you could make it dude!”

“Yeah, Marinette was worried you wouldn’t be able to make it,” Alya smirked.

“You were?” he asked, raising an eyebrow at her and she blushed.

“I mean- worried is the wrong word...I was just concerned-“

“Concerned is the same thing Marinette,” Alya giggled and Marinette shot her a glare.

“How was it with your dad?” she said, desperate to stop making a fool of herself but gasped when she realised what she’d said.

“I...Adrien I’m so sorry! I didn’t mean to ask about something so sensitive-“

“It’s okay Marinette. He’s getting better but he still has a while till recovery. It was good to see him,” he smiled, and she sighed in relief.

“Glad to hear it Adrien. Now let’s get this sleepover going!” Nino exclaimed as they made their way back to the bedroom.



It was one in the morning and Marinette decided that she hated Alya.

The brunette decided it would be a great idea to watch a horror movie before bed and to Marinette's dismay, Adrien and Nino agreed.

She didn't want to be the person to stop them, so she sat through two hours of jump scares, blood and death and when the credits rolled, she was exhausted from holding up the blanket to her eyes.

She glared at Alya and Nino in envy who were both sound asleep in their sleeping bags and groaned.

"Can't sleep?" a voice came from next to her and she tensed up.

"Woah, Marinette...it's just me," Adrien chuckled, and she lifted her hands to her face.

"I hate that I can't watch horror movies. Alya adores them and I do like them, but at night? When my imagination has free roam? I swear I'm seeing that creepy mask everywhere," she whispered.

He was silent for a moment before answering her.

"How about I talk to you until you fall asleep? I'll keep my voice down so we don't disturb the others."

"You sure? Aren't you tired?"

"I've had a pretty crazy day so I'm wide awake. Go ahead, ask me anything you want."

Marinette turned to face him, nervous excitement flowing through her veins.

"Anything huh?" she grinned, and he rolled his eyes.

"Anything I can answer without dying of humiliation."

The next two hours flew past with the two of them talking about fashion, modeling, memories from their childhood, food and their friends. Marinette had spent time alone with Adrien before but the way their conversation flowed felt so natural unlike any conversation she'd had with him previously.

Maybe it's because there weren't any akuma attacks to interrupt them.

"So, I told Juleka to wear her hair in a ponytail for the photoshoot and now she's experimenting with her hair. It's so nice to see her express herself and Rose is helping her too!"

"Oh, so that's why she wore it in a ponytail last week! It suits her. I remember one of the models at one of my dad's fashion shows refused to have her hair styled because she insisted that her hair was perfect already despite her long hair clashing with the style of the gown," he shuddered.

"What happened? Did your dad allow it?"

"Oh no, he fired her on the spot and replaced her. I understand my dad can be a little rough, but she was being a pain," he replied, and she giggled.

She felt a little sleepier and having Adrien talk to her was helping. It wasn't like she had anything urgent to do that morning so she could sleep when they all left. Marinette sighed before looking into his eyes and asking him what she had wanted to ask since the awkward encounter earlier that day.

"Were you...really okay with me asking about your dad earlier today? I know you said it was okay...but I just felt like I crossed the line."

He was quiet for a minute before answering her.

"Marinette, ever since the news broke out about my dad, it feels like people have been walking around eggshells with me. Even reporters who hound me for information...it's hard to have a conversation with someone when you can see the pity in their eyes...so I'm happy you asked today. It felt genuine."

Marinette was grateful for how dark it was in her room so he couldn't see how red her face was.

"I'm...I'm happy I could help. I know how this must feel for you, but I am happy your dad is feeling better."

"He talks so much more to me now that he's not buried in his work. He laughs and smiles and even though he misses me...it's the happiest I've seen him since my mom...y'know."

Marinette scooted a little closer so that their knees were touching through their sleeping bags.

“Yeah...I’m happy you’re happy. What do you two talk about anyway when you see him?”

“Normal stuff really. School, modelling but I finally told him how I felt my schedule was too much so he agreed to lessen my modelling appointments and piano lessons during the week so I could have more free time to see friends. Oh, we also talk a lot about my friends. I’ve spoken about Nino, Alya, you and our classmates but he’s noticed how often I talk about the three of you guys.”

Adrien’s smile was wide when he said this and Marinette couldn’t help but beam at him. He looked so much happier now than over the last couple weeks.

“*Adrien’s smile was wide when he said this and Marinette couldn’t help but beam at him.*”

“Nothing bad I hope!”

“Of course not! He knows how talented you are as a designer and likes that I’m friends with someone who ‘has such a beautiful vision of design in her eyes’ and can’t wait to see your work.”

The world seemed to stop and Marinette blinked at him.

“Gabriel Agreste... said that about me?” she squeaked, and he nodded.

“Adrien if I don’t die from that freaky mask dude in the movie tonight then I’m definitely dying of happiness.”

Adrien let out a low laugh and turned his head to the side and stretched his hands over his head before turning back to face her.

“He wants to meet you by the way.”

Marinette was sure she stopped breathing. Did she hear him correctly? His dad wanted to meet her?

“Your dad wants to meet me? Like with Alya and Nino-?”

“Just you.”

“Me... only me? But why-?”

Adrien smiled and closed his eyes as if he was recalling what his dad had said to him earlier that day.

“He’s impressed with your designs and wants to see you because you’re my friend. I guess he wants to play a more active role in my life as a father.”

Marinette could see the happiness in his eyes. She knew it must’ve been hard not having his mom or dad in the house but knowing he was spending more time with his dad was something she was grateful for. She remembered the sad look in his eyes when his dad couldn’t make it to school events so this seemed like a leap forward.

“That...that’s really sweet of him Adrien. I’m really happy for you.”

“Me too...hey are you dozing off? We can stop talking if you need to sleep.”

“I’ll just grumble in appreciation to your words. Tell me a story,” she yawned and closed her eyes.

“Okay...I’m not the best at telling stories but I’ll try,” he hummed.

“*Marinette could see the happiness in his eyes.*”

He began to weave a tale of a designer and an unknown woman and their romance. Marinette started to feel sleep take hold of her and she shifted under her sleeping bag.

To her it sounded like the story of how his dad met his mom which was sweet. She knew how much he missed them both and felt her eyes flutter shut once he ended the story.

“Y’know Marinette...I’m sure you’re asleep now but...I really do like you,” she heard him say and she was suddenly aware that their knees were still touching.

She gritted her teeth to stop herself from screaming. This wasn’t a dream, right?

“We’ve been friends for a while but you mean more to me than that. I’ve told my dad so much about you and now he thinks we’re dating. Can you believe it?” he laughed softly.

She heard him sigh next to her as he shifted back, their knees no longer touching and felt her heart break a little.

“I wish I had told you tonight but...I guess I’m scared too. I don’t know if you’re just being a kind friend or...if you want to be something more. I don’t know if I’m ready to get rejected if you don’t feel the same but...maybe I’ll try before I leave your house tomorrow.”

Marinette gently pinched herself under her blanket. She wasn’t dreaming. Everything she was hearing was true.

Her heart was pounding so loudly she could feel it in her ears and decided that it was now or never. She wasn’t sure if Adrien was going to go through with his plan the next day and she wasn’t letting him slip through that easily.

“Or I could just say I like you too,” she said as she opened her eyes and he let out a scream.

Her jaw dropped and launched herself out of her sleeping bag to cover his mouth with her hands and looked at Nino and Alya who seemed to still be asleep.

“Shhhh!” she said, struggling not to laugh, as she removed her hands from his mouth, and he breathed out.

“You scared me!” he whisper-yelled and she giggled.

“And you said you *liked* me.”

He froze and stared at her before nodding slowly, his green eyes bright under the moonlight.

“Yeah...I did say that and you...you said you liked me too?” he asked nervously.

“I...I did so does that mean we’re a...” she trailed off, her stomach churning.

“A couple? I...I’d like that if you want that,” he mumbled, and she giggled.

She hardly saw Adrien embarrassed in any way, but this was adorable. Silence hung in the air before Marinette smiled and placed a soft kiss on his cheek, his breath hitching as she pulled away.

“Now we’re actually dating, and you don’t have to lie to your dad,” she grinned, and he shook his head, a smile on his face.

“Never in a million years did I think my confession would turn out like this.”

“I liked it. Especially when I scared you,” she said snickering.

“I can’t believe I’m going to have to tell Nino this is how we started dating.”

“It’s going to be a classic story! Now we should get some sleep so that we aren’t sleep deprived when we break the news to those two tomorrow. I know that Alya will be screaming her head off.”

He laughed and watched her eyes close, her cheeks a beautiful shade of pink. He wasn’t sure when he started liking her more than a friend but right then and there, he felt a warmth spread from his heart to his entire body.

“Goodnight Adrien.”

“Goodnight Marinette. Sweet dreams.”

❖ ❖ ❖
THE END
❖ ❖ ❖



I Can See Clearly Now • Maggie

A chance roll of the dice

by: Emilie

BETA: Raven

Party-crashing Gabriel Agreste's ball with her best friend isn't the best of Marinette's ideas, but it's where she ends up anyway. Thankfully, a boy with golden hair and green eyes comes to her unexpected rescue when she finds herself in a tight place, has two dances with her, and lets her leave with promises of a next time.

Before Marinette's evening takes a turn for the better and she meets the boy with pretty blonde hair and even prettier green eyes, everything goes egregiously wrong first.

The initial tragedy is that she nearly tears her brand new dress sneaking into the Agreste mansion. It's also a matter of debate, but Alya says that one wrong move would've seen Marinette impaled on the spikes. She argues that she wasn't *that* bad, but Alya's insistent and Marinette finds herself too hypnotized by the wide array of lights and the sheer number of guests to continue the debate with her friend any further.

Thirty minutes after the break in finds Marinette lost with Alya missing, a tragedy in the making.

Her shoes click against the marble halls. The floor is polished to such perfection that Marinette can see her faint reflection peering back at her. The Agreste manor is far too large to be called a house, much less a home, but given that she hasn't actually seen any signs of the place being remotely *lived in*, perhaps the whole thing is there as one giant decoration—a showcase. At any rate, Gabriel Agreste is noxiously secretive about his private life, so she wouldn't be particularly surprised to find out if he didn't even live in the Agreste manor.

If being lost in the maze-like halls isn't bad enough, though, slamming into a security guard hammers the final nail into the coffin.

The man she bumps into is walking with enough speed to send Marinette to the floor a moment after she crashes into him. With a small cry of shock she pitches backwards and lands awkwardly on the cool marble floor, looking up with dawning horror at the man with the security band around his arm.

"Sorry," Marinette blurts, scrambling to her feet. Her wrist throbs. "Um. Sorry. I didn't mean to bump into you. Are you okay?"

She winces as soon as the words leave her mouth. A stupid question to ask, seeing how he'd barely budged an inch while she'd been sent sprawling.

"I'm fine," comes the gruff reply, and she's fixed with a scrutinizing look. "Guests aren't allowed back here, miss. You're quite far from the main hall. What are you doing back here?"

Marinette's brain spins on overdrive. "I—" She scrambles for a reply. "I got... lost?"

It's probably the closest to the truth tonight she'll tell to anyone, so the fact that he looks disbelieving about this already-half-truth is probably a bad sign. "Could you point me back to the direction where the rest of the guests are?"

"May I see your invitation first, miss?"

Oh. Oh, no.

"Um, I..." It's a miracle she doesn't panic then and there. "Uh, just..." She holds her wrist gingerly, hoping to garner some pity. In her defence, it genuinely hurts. "Just let me—let me find it. I can't remember where I put it and..."

Marinette makes a show patting herself down to look for the invitation that does not in fact exist. She's still ruffling through imaginary pockets when the guard lets out an irritated huff through his nose. His patience sounds like a weight balanced on a single thread when he speaks. "I'm going to have to escort you out, miss, if you don't have your invitation on you. It was very specifically requested for *guests* to keep their invitation on them at *all* times."

"I must've lost it," Marinette lies through her teeth. If she gets dragged out now—or worse, gets in trouble—what about Alya? Besides, there's still so much she wants to see around the Agreste mansion, and...

“That’s too bad.” The guard reaches for her arm. “I’m going to have to ask you to—”

“It’s okay,” a new voice interjects, “she’s with me.”

That’s *not* Alya’s voice, and even if it were, Alya has no authority to help her in a situation like this.

Marinette peeks at the owner of the voice—big surprise, it’s not Alya. From behind the guard, dressed in a rather simple black suit, is a boy about her age. Marinette must’ve missed the sound of his footsteps in the midst of her panic. He walks quietly, though, with a practiced sort of stealth.

He’s also jaw-droppingly gorgeous. Marinette’s breath catches not from nervousness but recognition. She knows that face.

The security guard also shares a similar sentiment. He dips immediately into a bow. “I apologize, young master—I didn’t realize she was with you.”

That’s because I’m not, Marinette thinks, but it’s a good thing her mouth is too dry to betray her thoughts. Because there is *no way in the world* she’s here with Adrien freaking Agreste.

“*He’s also jaw-droppingly gorgeous. Marinette’s breath catches not from nervousness but recognition.*”

He nods at the guard, much calmer than she feels. “It’s fine,” he replies quietly, then he turns to her. “I was looking for you.”

Marinette’s voice is pitched at least an octave too high when she replies. “Really?”

Adrien Agreste shoots a meaningful look at the guard, who’s still watching the exchange.

“*Really*,” he emphasizes. “Let’s go back.”

Marinette may be a klutz and an idiot for breaking into this party, but she isn’t stupid enough to not recognize a saviour when she meets one. She nods at him. “Yeah, okay.”

He offers her his arm, Marinette manages to not break down then and there, and they walk away from the guard.

As soon as Adrien Agreste leads her into a different hallway, she lets go of his arm as if shocked. Surprise flashes across his face, but he doesn’t question her. Instead, he dips his head. “I’m sorry,” he apologizes. “It wasn’t my intention to make you uncomfortable.”

Marinette shakes her head quickly. Now that the immediate threat is gone, her body feels like it's thrumming with a new sort of nervous energy. This is *Adrien Agreste*, son of Gabriel Agreste. He's barely been seen by the public and *God she could combust right now and die because how the hell is she meeting him and—*

"Would you, ah, like me to show you back to the hall?"

Yes, please, she wants to say, but the words that come out are: "Why did you help me back there?"

Adrien Agreste blinks. Marinette claps her hand over her mouth. "Sorry! It's not that I'm not thankful because I am! I'm just... surprised? Yeah. Surprised. Because you're..."

His eyes widen. "You know who I am?"

"Am I... not supposed to? You're Adrien Agreste, right?"

The emotions that flash across his face are brief yet many, but they're gone in the blink of the eye before Marinette can even try to understand any of them. The only thing that remains is a gentle smile. "Yes, I am Adrien Agreste. To answer your first question—I helped you because you looked like you were in a tough place. It's not your fault you lost your invitation, right?"

Marinette has never felt so guilty about lying in her life. She manages, "Right."

"Anyway..." Adrien scratches his head. "Would you like me to take you back? I know these halls can get quite confusing."

"Yes, please. Thank you," she tells him, and they continue their walk down the halls.

Another thirty seconds of silence pass, with Marinette growing increasingly jumpy. There's so little known about Gabriel Agreste's only son that it's barely better than anything at all, but the boy walking in casual stride with her is nothing that she'd expected.

When finally, the silence becomes so heavy that it feels like something will physically snap, Marinette summons up the dregs of her courage to speak up again. "Are you going to attend the party?"

Adrien doesn't answer immediately. Then he presses his lips together. "I'm not supposed to."

“Not supposed—*oh*.” Marinette stares down at her feet, feeling very much like she intruded on a moment that wasn’t meant for her to see, even if he *had* been the one to tell her. “I’m sorry.”

He offers her another smile. “It’s alright,” Adrien reassures. “It’s just... my father hosts these events because he’s expected to by the king, but that doesn’t mean he needs to bring me into the spotlight.”

“If you’re not allowed, is it alright if you bring me over?” she asks, slightly concerned.

He waves it off with an airy hand. “It’s alright. Besides, I wanted to go see it anyway. It’s not as if anyone will really recognize me.”

“I did,” Marinette points out.

Adrien lets out a small laugh. “Yeah, you did, which I’m still surprised about.”

It’s not that she knows a lot, particularly. She’s seen the news, especially regarding the passing of Emilie Agreste—and the now-motherless son of the renowned Gabriel Agreste. Marinette isn’t particularly keen on exposing her fascination with his father’s work with fashion to him too soon, so she settles with explaining, “I’ve heard bits and pieces here and there.”

“That makes sense.” His voice betrays none of his emotions, and Marinette is too much of a coward to look up at his face. “If you don’t mind me asking, what’s your name?”

In hindsight, it probably wasn’t a good idea to tell him. But it feels unfair to keep from this boy, who, in the little time she’s known him, feels lonely and brilliant and *real* at the same time. “Marinette,” she answers.

“Marinette,” he echoes back, and it sounds so lovely and right in his voice that she cracks a smile. “It was a pleasure to meet you.”

“Likewise. I probably wouldn’t be here if it weren’t for you.”

Whatever he’s about to say in response is cut off by the faint sound of the orchestra playing and the sound of chatter threading through the halls. Adrien straightens. “We’re almost here,” he says. “Go straight down this hall, take the first right and then the left after that, and you’ll enter the ballroom.”

Marinette pauses. “You’re leaving?”

“I... shouldn’t go against my father’s wishes.” He tucks his hands in the pockets of his coat. It’s a simple attire; now it makes much more sense that he’s dressed so modestly because he’s not supposed to be dressed up at all. “I do hope you enjoy your night, Marinette. It was lovely meeting you.”

Marinette’s mouth goes dry, like the thousand words that she wants to say prevents her from saying even *one* that counts.

“Goodnight, then, Adrien,” she says.

He nods to her, green eyes kind but unreadable, and Marinette turns down the halls with his instructions and voice echoing in her mind.

She barely knows him; apart from his name and his identity as Gabriel Agreste’s son and now this very limited conversation they’ve had, they *don’t* know each other. But the feeling that something’s *missing* and the fact that she very much doesn’t want him to leave is unmistakable, and Marinette realizes that she’s regretful that he has to go. She *wants* to get to know him better, this party she’d spent so long strategizing to get into be damned.

But there’s nothing she can do now, so Marinette shoves those thoughts to the back of her head and instead follows the directions he’s given her. Down the hall. Right. Left—

“*He nods to her, green eyes kind
but unreadable, and Marinette
turns down the halls*”

There’s the rushed clatter of footsteps behind her. Then Adrien Agreste’s voice says, “Wait.”

She stops and turns around.

His eyes are wider than before, he looks out of breath but there’s a new sort of determination shining behind his face. “Can I have the next dance with you?”

Marinette blinks once. Then she smiles. “Okay.”

Marinette’s good at dancing, but it isn’t exactly the sort that’s suited for ballrooms and slow songs.

“Yes,” Marinette blurts. “I mean, yes to going outside. It would be nice to get some fresh air as well.”

The relief is palpable on Adrien’s face. “This way, then.”

They thread through the crowd. It’s a miracle that Marinette and Adrien don’t end up separated by the time they reach the edges of it, although the fact that he’s gripping her hand probably has to do with it. Come to think of it, he’s been holding her hand for a while and for some reason, it feels more intimate than the dancing position and Marinette is pretty sure her palms are awfully sweaty—

“We should be able to sneak through here,” Adrien says, successfully cutting through her thoughts. “As long as we don’t draw attention from the guards. Besides, I don’t think the gardens are *technically* off limits.”

Sneak through they do. Marinette doesn’t comment on how Adrien is surprisingly adept at moving silently. It’s not just quiet; it’s the way he seems to blend in with his surroundings, almost unnoticeable in a way. She really would’ve lost track of him if he hadn’t been holding onto her.

“*... He’s been holding her hand for a while and for some reason, it feels more intimate than the dancing...*”

Either way, they make it outside without any difficulties. The moment Adrien pushes open a door—it’s a smaller exit, away from the bustle of the party—and Marinette is hit with a breath of cool night air, she completely forgets all about her initial reasons for sneaking into the party.

Because this—caught up in these moments in-between with Adrien, where the sweet scent in the air isn’t from the expensive perfume of guests but from the flowers of the garden; where the sound of the wind is much prettier than the music and chatter inside; where the moon illuminates everything with more clarity than the fancy chandeliers inside—something about *this* truly takes Marinette’s breath away.

“There won’t be anyone around here, I don’t think,” Adrien murmurs. “That was... more crowded than I expected. My apologies, again. I’ve never actually learned how to dance. It was a new experience for me, and I’m grateful you put up with me through it.”

Marinette brushes it off. “It’s fine. Ballroom dancing—at least, slow dancing—isn’t what I know either.”

She dances with her parents in the living room when the blinds are drawn around the bakery, twirling around with her father or by herself as her mother plays the piano or her father's bow glides across the violin like ice-skating and her mother clapping and singing along. Now, this song the orchestra is playing is slow—*too slow*—and each note feels drawled at a snail's pace, and Marinette's itching for it to go faster. But she can't, not in this sort of setting, where ladies prim and proper sway with their partners at the pace of the music.

"Are you *sure* you want to dance?" Marinette asks Adrien in a low voice as they edge onto the floor. "I'm not *that* good, you know."

"Neither am I," he whispers back. "Never learned."

A giggle escapes her, despite everything. "What a duo we make."

Despite their reservations, they both end up on the dance floor. They don't stand out, thankfully, and no one seems to recognize Adrien. His hands remain hesitant on her waist and shoulders, Marinette grips him with similar awkwardness.

At one point she steps on his foot. Adrien winces, but he doesn't make a sound.

Marinette cringes into herself. "I'm so sorry."

"It's okay," he mumbles. "I think I've stepped on you too."

"I can't feel anything because my feet hurt so much from these shoes, so you're good."

That coaxes a laugh out of him, even if it still sounds nervous. "My heart goes out to you."

The silence between them, mixed with mingling breaths and tingling nerves, is a long one. Marinette takes the time to coach herself through the events of the night, but it's hard to focus when she's standing so close to Adrien, both of them stumbling over the steps. The orchestra switches songs, this one just as slow and drab, and Adrien cracks first.

"Absurd idea," he whispers, "but what do you think about escaping to the garden?"

Marinette blinks in surprise. "Now?" she asks.

"Only... I mean, only if you wanted to. I just thought you might—forgive me if I'm overstepping, but you don't look particularly thrilled about this dance—"

His laughter subsides after a little while, and Marinette remembers to look away for the sake of her remaining dignity. She clears her throat. “Thank you,” she tells him, and she means it even if she has no idea how to form the rest of her thoughts into words; she’s thankful for the time and the dancing and the help and his willingness to learn, but it’s all too much to say so Marinette keeps it to herself.

Adrien’s gaze lingers on her for a while more before he looks down. “No, thank *you*,” he murmurs. “I... really enjoyed myself tonight, and I don’t think it would’ve been nearly as good if I hadn’t been with you.”

Marinette beams at him. “Me too.” She casts one more regretful glance at the sky. “B-but it’s getting late, and I probably have to get back to my friend and leave. The party is ending soon as well, right?”

They both glance towards the mansion at that comment, even if there’s nothing to really see. Adrien lets out a sigh and runs his hands through his hair. “Yeah, it’ll be wrapping up soon,” he murmurs, though it sounds more like he’s talking to himself than her. “I should probably go back, because if they haven’t noticed I’m missing already, they will soon.”

“Oh,” is what Marinette says. “I guess we’ll be parting, then.”

“Yeah,” Adrien agrees, even when neither of them move. “I guess—I guess we will be.”

He doesn’t say anything else, but Marinette feels her own unsaid words lingering at the back of her throat: *but I don’t want to*. The party is a distant thing in the back of her mind; all she knows is that outside, here with the two of them, is a much better alternative.

An alternative that is going to be ending now, it seems.

“I’ll...” The words don’t feel right. She has no business thinking that she’ll *miss* him, really, not after they’ve barely known each other for more than the expanse of this night. But Marinette still feels—not thinks, but feels—that she will. “Um. I hope I’ll see you around, Adrien Agreste.”

He pauses. “I would like that. Perhaps I can come find you, if you don’t mind.”

“Y-yeah.” Marinette pats her dress down until she finds the pen she’d put into a pocket she’d sewn in herself. “Um—actually, if you want, I can give you my address?”

“So you *do* know how to dance?”

She thinks of twirling around the living room with her parents. “I guess? Not really the sort of dancing you’re thinking about.”

“What kind, then?”

They’ve wandered a little ways from the door; the lights of the party are faraway now. The grass looks dark grey under the moon—everything is washed anew with the pale light. Marinette rolls her shoulders, savouring the chill of the wind. “Don’t really know what to call it. It’s much faster-paced, though.”

Adrien’s gaze pierces her for a few seconds before he says, “Can you teach me?”

Marinette does a double take. “Teach you?”

“Yeah. Your—your sort of dancing. It sounds more fun.”

His eyes meet hers, almost distractingly genuine. Even before he adds on the, “please?” Marinette is absolutely sold, and the thought of saying *no* to the request drifts further and further away.

“... something about this truly takes Marinette’s breath away.”

“Alright,” she agrees, even if her mind is made long before she says the words. “I’ll teach you.”

It’s how they end up, with Marinette barefoot on the grass, a reprieve from her uncomfortable heels. She lifts her skirts up enough that they won’t get into the way, standing across from Adrien, and teaches him the steps to the dance bit by bit.

The night slips by like water, time flowing in a steady trickle until its meaning is lost altogether. Marinette is only reminded of the time when she peers up at the sky to find the moon at a much higher position than it had been the last she’d checked.

Both her and Adrien are tired, red-cheeked and flushed with adrenaline and joy. The tension of unknowing has melted between them, and Marinette digs her toes into the cool grass and grins at him. “Think you picked up a thing or two?”

She doesn’t mean it to be funny, but for some reason, Adrien throws his head back and lets out a laugh. It isn’t like the quiet, hesitant ones from before; this is full and *open* and bright, and Marinette stares at the sound of *ease* and the look of happiness. And perhaps *stare* isn’t even the correct word—because she *gawks*.

It's not that hard to find and it's only ten minutes walk from here if you want. If you ever want to—or have the time to—come by, that is.”

Adrien pauses, considers, then smiles. “Sure.”

Because neither of them can find any paper, she ends up scribbling it on Adrien's arm. He pulls down his sleeve to cover the writing when she finishes, and they share one last smile before Adrien dips his head. “I should go around another way,” he says apologetically, then takes her hand and lifts it gently before pressing a kiss against the back of it. “Thank you again, Marinette.”

“No—thank *you*.” Marinette thanks the darkness for hiding her burning cheeks, and despite all her reservations, leans up to leave her own kiss lightly against his cheek. “I-I'll see you soon, Adrien Agreste.”

His smile blooms at his name, and Marinette wants to say it again just to see him smile like that. “See you soon, Marinette,” he echoes.

THE END



An Ice Cream Revelation · SRealms

Cards on the Table

by: SariahSue

BETA: GalahadWilder

After six months of dating, Adrien decides it's time to tell Marinette his biggest secret. And he knows her so well he can accurately predict her reaction... right?

Through the dark mist of twilight, Chat Noir watched the bench where he, as Adrien, would be meeting Marinette in a few minutes. Now, his tail twitched. His fake ears swiveled, and the bench remained deserted. His girlfriend was not early.

Not surprising. After six months together, he felt like he knew her inside and out. She'd be between ten and fifteen minutes late, pink-faced and puffing. He wished that for once he would be wrong. This wait was going to kill him.

Ladybug, who he knew even better than Marinette, was right on time as usual. Her landing on the bridge behind him was soft and expected, but still enough to make him jump, as taut as his nerves were.

"What's so urgent, Kitty?"

He spun around to find her, his eyes leaving the bench for the first time since his arrival. "I told you I'm dating someone, right?" He knew he had. Ages ago, as soon as they'd made it official.

Ladybug snorted. "Only every time you open your mouth." She spun her yoyo around in three full circles, waiting for his response to her jibe.

None came.

"Is everything okay with you two?" she asked.

“Hm? Oh, yeah! She’s great. It’s nothing like that. It’s just...” Secret identities were so important to his partner, so he already knew what her stance on this would be.

“I hate lying to her,” he said, and held his breath.

Ladybug leaned forward, staring at the water so far below. Reflections of street lights sparkled on the surface. “You want to tell her,” she said. Her tone wasn’t accusatory, or even surprised.

He took it as a good sign and went on. “Yeah. I’m meeting her in a few minutes. I just wanted to tell you about it first.”

“You’re sure she won’t—”

“Tell anyone?” He was ready for that question too. “Absolutely.”

“Not even if you two break up?”

There wasn’t any suspicion or ill will in her voice. The neutral tone she’d asked with caught him off guard as much as the question.

Break up? Never. Heat started to creep up his neck. There was no way he was letting Marinette go. But that wasn’t the answer LB was looking for.

“Yes, I’m sure she’d never say anything,” he said. Out of everything, that was the least of his worries. Marinette was too kind, and loved Paris’s heroes too much. She would never.

Ladybug crossed her arms over her chest. Before she could voice another excuse, Chat Noir cut her off. “I’m not asking for your permission,” he said. “I just... wanted to let you know beforehand.”

Ladybug stared, then nodded slowly, like she was accepting the hopelessness of her situation. “You’re braver than I am, you know,” she finally said.

Chat Noir smiled and covered his heart. “So you admit it at last.”

“I mean it,” she said, grabbing his hand. One quick squeeze, and then she let go. “I’ve wanted to tell my boyfriend, but I’ve been too much of a chicken.” She smiled. “Let me know how it goes?”

“What are you scared of?” Chat Noir said. “I’m sure he’ll be thrilled to find out he’s been secretly dating Ladybug this whole time.”

“Knowing him, probably,” she said, tapping her chin. “No, definitely.”

Chat Noir couldn't see her reaction, but it sounded like she was smiling. His attention was already back on the empty bench. “I'll see you on the next patrol.”

Ladybug's yoyo zipped out, a flash in the dark, and he turned back to catch her last words before she leaped away. “Good luck,” she said. “Not that you'll need it. I'm sure she'll be thrilled too.”



Adrien strolled down the sidewalk to his and Marinette's meeting spot (the same spot as their very first date, and he knew she would notice), hands in his pockets to keep them from shaking, and eagerly playing out the scenario in his mind. He'd tease her with the promise of forbidden knowledge. Shock would follow when he gently broke the news that he'd been keeping a secret from her, but she'd quickly forgive him when she learned what it was. He knew exactly what her shy blush would look like, how it would make her eyes and her freckles seem brighter.

It wasn't until he'd sat down on the bench and forced his palms flat against the slats in an effort to relax his jittery fingers did he start to think that something was odd. Ladybug had been easier to convince than he'd expected. Where was the argument? Where was the lecture about safety? Even weirder: She herself was tempted to share her secret? That was the strangest of all, but he didn't have time to dissect this new facet of Ladybug's psyche he'd unexpectedly uncovered.

Eleven minutes into their date, Marinette ran up, pink-faced and puffing.

“Sorry, sorry, sorry!” she said, waving at him with both hands. “I had a thing.”

“We need to talk,” he said, already wincing at his delivery. Marinette was tough, but easily alarmed. She reached for her purse instinctively, then dropped her hands just as quickly, like she hoped he hadn't noticed.

“It's nothing bad,” he said, patting the spot next to him.

“So it's good?” She sat, leaving six inches of space between them. Six inches too many.

“Yes,” he said, sliding over to her and taking her hand. It was soft and unsettling and comforting all at once, just like the first time, when he first told her that he thought

he liked her as more than a friend and asked if maybe she'd like to go get ice cream or something with him.

Adrien rubbed his thumb over her palm. "This is something that I've never told anyone else, ever," he whispered. Yes, yes, better. Build up the anticipation.

As nervous as she was, curiosity won out, and Marinette's eyes found his.

"And you can't tell anyone," he said, holding up a pinky. "Promise?"

"Yes?" she whispered, hooking her little finger with his.

Adrien took a deep breath. This was the moment. He steeled himself, eyes closed, gathering strength. "I know what I'm about to tell you is incredible, but I'm telling you the truth. I'd never lie to you, especially about something like this."

"This is something that I've never told anyone else, ever."

His eyes snapped open and in a rush he said, "I am Chat Noir."

As he expected, wide-eyed shock flashed across her face. "What?" she croaked.

"Really, I am," he said.

She nodded dumbly.

He took it as a sign to fill up the awkward silence that she was making. He showed her his ring, told her that he'd hated lying to her this whole time, and that he trusted her.

"So," he finished. "You must have a lot of questions. Are you okay with this?"

The explanation should have given her enough time to collect her thoughts, but Marinette continued to stare at him. Cars flashed past them on the street, flickering shadows onto her face, only allowing him flashes of her expression. Concerned? Afraid? Unhappy? This wasn't going according to plan.

"Listen, I know this is very shocking and kind of a lot to take in. But it's still just me, okay?" His voice rose in pitch in time with his anxiety. "And- and I promise I won't let anything happen to you!" The bench creaked beneath him as he shifted forward, leaning into her space. "Just... just say something, please?"

Timid fingers came up to his cheek, and Marinette traced the outline of his mask across one cheekbone.

And then she started laughing. Hard.

Adrien leaned backward in surprise, letting Marinette's hand hang in the air between them, until she finally let it drop and doubled up, giggling into her knees.

Marinette had never laughed at him when he was being serious, so she must have thought he was joking.

"I... I'm telling the truth!"

"Oh," she said between peals of laughter. "I know you are. It's just— it's just that—" Her sentence broke off into spluttering chuckles.

“And then she started laughing. Hard.”

Adrien let her laugh for another minute as he marinated in his confusion. He could think of no reason for this reaction. What was he missing? He thought he knew her better than this. "Your boyfriend is a famous superhero," he finally said. "The least you could do is be impressed."

Marinette snorted into her lap again. "Sorry," she said. "It's just..." She reached over and patted his knee. "Us. This whole thing..."

Adrien sighed loudly. "You weren't supposed to find this so funny," he said.

"Sorry," she said. She breathed in quick short gasps, like she was trying to swallow her giggles, but several escaped anyway.

"If you're quite done," Adrien said sulkily. He got to his feet and offered her his hand.

"I'm sorry for laughing," she said, though her voice still shook with the effort of controlling herself, and her lips were pressed too tightly together.

He raised an eyebrow, disbelieving.

"Don't be like that," she said, pushing herself up onto her toes to kiss him. After the first spark of contact faded, Adrien relaxed, his tension seeping away. Until Marinette laughed against his mouth.

"Oh, come on." Adrien broke away from her hold and crossed his arms. "What is so funny about this?"

"Everything," she said.

"And are you going to explain 'everything' to me?"

“Didn’t you have something planned for us tonight?” she asked, lacing her fingers through his and smiling up at him in a way that said, *I know how much you love me and therefore I can get away with anything.*

Adrien huffed. At least he could still read that expression, though he hated knowing she was right. There was no getting information out of her now. “Sure.”

“Lead the way, superhero,” she said, even as she started to drag him toward the waiting limo.

Still musing, Adrien opened the door for his girlfriend and handed her in. It was unsettling, how he’d been so wrong about her reaction. Marinette had always been an open book to him, and suddenly that gleam in her eye hid something that he couldn’t explain, some secret that she was keeping from him.

And her eyes gleamed that way for the rest of the night.



Early morning shadows clung to streets of Paris like mist as Chat Noir vaulted himself out his window and into the sunshine that peeked in between the skyscrapers. Patrols were still his favorite way to start the day, and this morning it was especially a relief. Patrols made sense. His sync with Ladybug was infallible, as easy as breathing, and that was exactly what he needed right now. Some predictability.

That idea was shot to pieces when he touched down on the Eiffel Tower’s observation deck and found Ladybug waiting for him. Ladybug, who hated mornings. Ladybug, who always showed up rubbing her eyes and trying to swallow her yawns. Ladybug, who had never before beaten him to a morning patrol with a chipper wave and a muffin for him when he sat down next to her.

One more link in the bizarre chain that was the last twelve hours.

“So how did telling your girlfriend go?” she asked.

Chat Noir peeled the muffin’s wrapper back and took a bite. “She thought it was funny,” he said around a mouthful. “Funny! You find out your boyfriend risks his life on a regular basis and that’s funny?”

Ladybug's nod was deep and solemn. "You're right," she said. "This is very serious business. She should have been amazed and awed at your courage to fight akumas, and your skill at making terrible cat puns at the same time."

He bumped her shoulder and pretended she wasn't teasing him. "I honestly thought she wasn't going to believe me. I had this whole speech prepared to convince her I was serious and that she didn't need to worry and how this didn't change anything. I practiced and everything."

"And you didn't get to use it? My poor Kitty."

"And when I introduced her to Plagg," he said, tucking the empty muffin wrapper in his pocket, "they just got along instantly, like they'd been friends for ages. Kind of worries me, honestly."

"Knowing Plagg, I'd say that's something to worry about, Adrien."

The light from the sun seemed to go out all at once. "W-what did you just call me?"

"I said 'Chat Noir.'" Ladybug had her chin in one hand, peering up at him like she hadn't just upended reality.

"N-no, you didn't."

"Well, you—" Ladybug covered her mouth, shook her head, and tried again. "It all—" Her own laughter interrupted her. Her head dropped onto his shoulder as she doubled up, folding her legs up to her chest.

Not you too! he thought. Had his view of the world always been this skewed? Or was he simply missing some crucial piece of information? There was nothing funny here, but Ladybug was laughing herself silly into her knees, just like Marinette had done.

He set those concerns aside to ask the more important question: "How did you know?"

"You told me yesterday, you big dork."

Chat Noir slid away from her to give himself room to breathe. "No, I didn't. I—"

Suddenly, he saw a flash of pink light, and his girlfriend blinked into existence, holding the same posture that Ladybug had, fingers pressed to a broad smile, shoulders shaking, eyes shining. "I'd been hoping I could last longer," she said. "It would have been more fun to keep you guessing."

“I think I’m still guessing.” But the missing pieces were already starting to fall into place. How had he missed this? How? He thought he had known them both.

Marinette was still smiling. “Would you like to hear how I’m super impressed with your superheroing and grateful to you for saving my life a bunch of times?”

“No, no,” he said, letting his transformation go as well. “You’ve saved me just as often. Let’s just drop it.”

He wished he could smile back at her, but he settled for watching the wind play with her hair and hoped he looked contemplative. “I don’t know you as well as I thought I did.”

“I know! Isn’t it great?” she said, throwing her arms out wide.

“Uh, sure,” he said. “I love surprises.”

“You know,” she said, peeking around them and then tugging on his sleeve, “civilians aren’t supposed to be up here this early.”

“A shame really,” Adrien said, letting himself be dragged back toward her. “They could enjoy all the peace and quiet if they were here.”

“How long do you think we can stay up here without getting into trouble?”

“What, just stay out here without our suits and hope no one catches us?”

Marinette laid her head on his shoulder and nodded.

The Ladybug he knew would never be so cavalier with her identity. Would she? “Who are you, and what have you done with my lady?”

She turned her face, giggling into the fabric of his shirt and following it with a kiss, a familiar touch from her that was at odds with the surreal setting, and it grounded him. Marinette was here. Marinette was happy to have learned something new about him.

“I’m glad it worked out like this,” she said, snuggling into his side. “This is perfect.”

Maybe she was right.

THE END

Closet of Secrets

by: WyomingParmesan

When Alya wants to have a sleepover with Nino and her parents refuse to leave them alone together, she decides to invite Marinette and Adrien along. The two soon discover something different about themselves with a little help from their friends.

“I don’t know Alya...”

Marinette tapped her pencil against the desk as she stared at her best friend on the other side of the screen.

“Please, Marinette? I think it would be a ton of fun,” Alya said.

“You know I love sleepovers with you, but I’m afraid I’d feel like a third wheel,” Marinette pursed her lips.

“You know Nino and I could never think of you that way,” said her best friend. “It’s just that my parents won’t let us be alone or even sleep in the same room by ourselves.”

“Are you sure you guys are ready for taking a step like that in your relationship?”, Marinette asked, sitting back in her chair.

“Positive,” Alya held up an “ok” sign. She began tapping her chin, looking up in thought. “In fact...I may have thought of another way I could persuade you.”

Marinette sighed, preparing herself for whatever her best friend was about to throw at her. “What is it?”

“Okay, so, I know it’s a long shot, but...”, Alya began. “Maybe we could see if Adrien could come too?” Her words were accompanied by a big smile on her face. “Then we really could make it into a slumber party.”

Marinette sat completely still. Adrien...slumber party...a combination she never thought would become a reality. He had seen her in her pajamas before, so that wasn’t much of an issue. The thought of Adrien in pajamas though...it was enough to set her mind abuzz.

Her heart began to pound in her chest at the mere thought of being able to sleep in the same room as Adrien. They could share stories and maybe even snacks together. She knew his favorite ones, after all.

Then her mind drifted to a darker place. There was the chance that she could accidentally walk in on him at the wrong time; leaving him exposed to parts he didn’t want her to see. She could spill her drink on him or drool all over his pillow.

The smile that had subconsciously formed on her face quickly turned into a frown.

“I-I don’t know, Alya,” she said, her voice shaking a little. “I mean, there’s a slim chance of his dad even letting him go.”

“You have a point,” Alya said. “But I know Adrien has a way of being convincing. Plus, my parents would have no problem meeting his father if that’s what he chooses to do.”

Marinette took a deep breath, trying to relieve herself from any anxious feelings still remaining in her mind. “Okay, if by some crazy chance his father actually says ‘yes’,” she said. “Then I’ll go.”

“And if he doesn’t?”

“I’ll still go because you’re my best friend,” she watched Alya’s face light up on the screen.

She squealed in delight. “Awesome! I’ll go text Adrien right now,” she lifted her phone up. “Talk to you at school tomorrow?”

“As always,” Marinette responded. “Good night, Alya.”

“See ya, Marinette,” she said before hanging up the call.

Marinette locked her phone before sitting on her desk chair. Throwing her head back, she pushed her legs so that her chair slid to the other side of the room. She

spun around a couple of times before stopping once she noticed a familiar red blur in front of her.

“Marinette, you’re going to make yourself dizzy,” said Tikki in her usual squeaky voice.

“Good,” she responded. “Maybe then I won’t think about how completely nervous I am about the fact that I could be going to a slumber party with ADRIEN!” She threw her hands up in the air before tugging at her pigtails.

“But Marinette,” Tikki began. “You’re always talking about how you wish you could be closer to Adrien. Now might be your chance!”

Marinette pondered her kwami’s words for a moment. There indeed had been a few times in the past where she had wished that she and Adrien were closer. Sure, they were already friends, but she wanted them to be best friends. She still found herself unable to speak more than a few sentences around him without feeling as though she had been hit with a stun gun. Perhaps being in an environment where they were both a bit uncomfortable could remedy that.

She hoped so, anyway.

Taking a deep breath, she spoke once again. “You’re right, Tikki,” she said. “Maybe having Alya and Nino there will make it a bit less awkward.” She held out her arms, cupping her hands together to let the kwami sit in them. “Who knows? Maybe it’ll be pretty fun.”

“That’s the spirit,” Tikki said. “Now, how about you finish your homework before dinner?”

Marinette looked back over at her desk. Her eyes caught the open textbook which also contained her unfinished homework. “Ah, yeah. I should probably do that,” she let Tikki fly out of her hands. Using her feet, she scooted back to her desk on the other side of the room.

As she continued to work, going through the various math problems and English vocabulary words, her phone rang once again. Her eyes moved upwards to see Alya’s name splayed across the screen.

Despite Tikki’s stern look, she picked up the phone and was once again greeted with her best friend’s face. “Hey Alya, what’s up?”, she said, returning her kwami’s side eyed expression.

“Okay, I’ve got really amazing news,” Alya said, her face lighting up.

Marinette put her phone close to her face. “What is it?”

Alya sat her phone down in front of her. “So, I talked to Adrien,” she began. Her lips were in a straight line, making it so that Marinette was unable to predict how their conversation had gone.

Her heart picked up a bit of speed at the mere mention of his name. “Oh? You did? How did that go?”, she asked in anticipation.

“It went great!”, Alya said, her lips curling into a smile. “He talked to his father and he’s actually letting him come along!” She bounced a little in her seat. “Isn’t that awesome?!”

Marinette felt a small gust of wind blow behind her as she sat up straight in her chair. “Y-Yeah! That is awesome!”, she smiled. “Now it’ll be loads of fun.”

“Right?”, said her best friend. “Although, there is one teensy, tiny thing.” She made a gesture with her thumb and index finger as she spoke.

Marinette felt her breath escape her. “What is it?”, she asked. “Please tell me it’s something good.”

“Oh, it is, trust me,” Alya continued. “With Adrien’s schedule being so crazy booked, he was a bit short on time to do this.” She readjusted her glasses. “Sooooo we kinda have to do it tomorrow.”

A lump formed in Marinette’s throat, causing her to gulp. “T-Tomorrow? That soon?”

“Yeah! That’ll be fine though, right?”, Alya said, taking notice of her best friend’s visible distress. “You, Adrien, and Nino can come home with me after school. Just bring your overnight bag with you.”

Marinette’s fingers started to unconsciously tap on her desk, causing her to pull her hand back. “O-Okay, sounds good!”, she put one leg on top of the other to keep her from tapping her toes. “So I’ll see you tomorrow at school then?”

“You know it, girl!”, Alya responded. “I’ll let you go now so you can finish your homework.” She used a finger to point at Marinette’s book through the screen.

“*Her heart picked up a bit of speed at the mere mention of his name.*”

She looked back down at her work. “Oh! Right, okay, see you tomorrow,” she said nervously. “Have a good night, Alya.”

“Sweet dreams, Marinette,” she said before hanging up the phone.

Setting her phone down on the desk, Marinette felt the sudden urge to scream. The pressure built up in her chest, but she knew it was a bad idea with it being late at night. She took a few deep breaths, letting the clean air of her room flow through her lungs as she tried to suppress her feelings.

Instead, she simply threw her head back and groaned. She was met face to face with her kwami, who was smiling at her softly. “Tiiiikiiii,” she said, dragging out her name in exasperation. “I can’t believe this.”

“But Marinette, you were so excited about this not too long ago,” Tikki said. “What changed?”

“*Setting her phone down on the desk,
Marinette felt the sudden urge
to scream.*”

“I thought I would have more time to prepare!”, she threw her arms in the air. “But now I only have tonight to figure out what to wear in front of...” She put her hands over her face as she let out another groan. “Adrien! He’s going to see my pajamas!”

It was then that she leapt out of her chair and ran to her dresser. She opened the drawers, throwing clothes over her shoulder if she deemed them to be too “inappropriate”. Meanwhile, Tikki dodged her throws as she tried to get closer to her owner.

“Marinette!”, her small voice squeaked. “You need to calm down.” She finally made it to her owner, where she floated in front of her face. “Have you ever thought that maybe Adrien won’t really care about what you wear to bed?”

“Adrien is a fashion model, Tikki,” she said. “And his father is a fashion designer, so of course he cares about clothes.” She held up the top she had in her hand, one that had her signature motif embroidered in the center, and threw it over her shoulder.

“But that doesn’t mean Adrien will judge you based on what you wear,” Tikki told her. “He did like that hat you designed, remember?”

Marinette sighed, her shoulders and head slumping. “Okay, maybe you’re right,” she said. She turned around, squeaking when she saw the messy pile of clothes she had made behind her. “And maybe the perfect outfit is hidden somewhere in that mess.”

As she ran over to look through the pile, Tikki held up her paws in encouragement. “That’s the spirit, Marinette!”



Marinette kept her eyes on the clock that hung just above the whiteboard. Miss Bustier was speaking, but her words were drowned out by the sound of her heart pounding in her chest. She wrote down the notes as they appeared on the board, trying her best to not look at the eager blond who sat in front of her.

Adrien was in the same situation. His eyes were glued to the front of the room; his eyes shifting between the board and the clock. His foot tapped on the hard floor, matching the rhythm of his heartbeat.

Alya noticed her best friend’s demeanor and leaned closer to her. “Why are you so nervous, girl?”, she whispered.

“You know why,” Marinette answered before turning back to the front.

“Relax, it’ll be fine,” Alya said. “I’ve got some fun things planned that’ll totally guarantee everyone has a great time.”

Marinette gave her a little smile. “Okay, I believe you,” she said.

After recording a few more notes, Miss Bustier dismissed them for the day.

“And don’t forget about your projects that are due next week,” she said as the students began to gather their things. “I expect you all to do a phenomenal job on them.”

Marinette leaned over into the aisle and stuffed her books in her bag. She looked up to see Adrien doing the same. “Hey, Alya?”, she called to her best friend.

“Yeah?”, she asked.

“I need to stop by my locker really quick,” she said. “I left my overnight bag in there.”

Alya stood up and waved. “Go ahead, we’ll wait for you.”

She went to join Nino, who was standing in the aisle. Marinette watched as they walked out of the classroom, hands intertwined.

“Hey, Marinette.”

She jumped back a bit, feeling a spark go down her spine as Adrien said her name. “Oh, hey Adrien,” she said, finally standing up and throwing her bag over her shoulder.

“Are you excited about tonight?”, he asked, his eyes lighting up. “I still can’t believe my father is actually letting me tag along.” His smile grew wider, which only made her feel like melting into a puddle. “It’ll be my first sleepover.”

She nodded, returning his smile. “Y-Yeah, I’m very excited,” she said. “I mean, I’ve slept over at Alya’s house before, but this’ll be the first time you and Nino are there with us.”

Stepping out from behind her desk, she and Adrien carefully stepped down to the bottom floor so they could walk out of the classroom. “Yeah, I think it’ll be fun,” Adrien said. “I’ve only ever seen slumber parties in movies and stuff.”

They giggled as they walked across the hall to the lockers. “Yeah, the ones in movies always look super fun, huh?”, Marinette said as she reached for the lock on her locker. Adrien went to his locker, which was beside hers, and grabbed his bag from it. She examined him, smiling at the fact that they both had the idea to keep their bags in their lockers.

He took notice of this as well, laughing a little. “Heh, looks like we both had the same idea,” he threw the backpack over his shoulder.

“Um...yeah, haha,” she said, doing the same. She looked back and forth between their bags, noticing that they were similar in color. “It seems we have similar taste too.”

Adrien’s bag was green and gray, while Marinette’s was white and pink. Both shared a similar pattern of stripes, though. The only difference was that hers included her signature logo that she had embroidered herself.

“I always knew you had good taste,” Adrien winked at her before turning around and gesturing with his hand. “Come on, we don’t want to keep Alya and Nino waiting for too long.”

She nodded and followed him as they walked outside to the front of the school. Alya and Nino were already in the car, having left the window down so they could easily be seen. They spotted their friends and began gesturing at them to hurry up.

Adrien didn't hesitate to grab Marinette's hand so that they could speed walk down the stairs. Marinette felt her face heat up a bit at his gesture.

Alya sat in the passenger seat next to her mom, while Nino scooted over so that Marinette and Adrien could squeeze in next to him. "Finally, you two made it," he said. "Ready to have the time of your lives?"

Alya's mom looked at them from the rear view mirror. "Hello, Marinette, Adrien," she said with a warm smile. "You two buckled in yet?"

They grabbed their seatbelts and fastened them. "Good to see you again, Mrs. Césaire," Adrien said. "Thank you for allowing me to stay."

"It's our pleasure," she said, starting up the car. "Alya has been wanting to do something like this for the longest time."

Alya rolled her eyes. "Moooom," she said, making her laugh. "But it is true. I've been wanting to have a sleepover like this ever since we became friends."

“Adrien didn't hesitate to grab Marinette's hand so that they could speed walk down the stairs.”

Marinette looked between Adrien and Nino. "Alya and I always have the best time whenever I come over," she said. "We can watch movies and eat popcorn, or tell funny stories, or play video games or—"

"Sounds like you two always have a lot of fun," Adrien said.

"Oh we definitely do," Alya said from the front seat. "Just no scary movies or Marinette might end up in your lap."

"Hey!", Marinette exclaimed, her cheeks turning red. She looked down at her lap and tapped her fingers together. "It's true that I hate scary movies though."

"That's okay, Marinette," Adrien said. "I'm sure Alya has plenty of non-scary movies we can watch."

“Totally,” Alya replied. “I’ve got an entire collection of movies.”

When they finally arrived at Alya’s apartment building, her mom stopped the car. Adrien could feel the excitement building up inside him, causing him to tap his feet rapidly.

“*Adrien could feel the excitement building up inside him, causing him to tap his feet rapidly.*”

Marinette giggled. “I can tell you’re really excited,” she blushed when she noticed his face turning a bit red.

He looked down at his feet sheepishly. “Heh, sorry about that,” he said, opening the door. “It’s just a habit of mine.”

He exited the car, standing next to the door as he waited for Marinette and Nino to follow suit. Alya was ahead of them as she followed her mom, looking back and gesturing for them to come along.

They followed Alya and her mom up to the entrance and got into the elevator that was inside the lobby. Alya stood next to Nino, leaving Adrien to stand next to Marinette.

The elevator was small, meaning they had to pack tightly inside. Marinette’s blush deepened as she found herself being pushed up against Adrien in a way where their arms and fingers brushed against each other.

She wasn’t aware if he noticed her blush or not because all he did was look forward and smile. Once the elevator dinged and the door opened, everyone stepped outside and headed to Alya’s apartment.

“Ready guys?”, Alya asked. They responded by nodding eagerly. She opened the door and stood aside to let them all in. “I spent most of the morning cleaning so you guys could come over.”

Marinette and Nino took in the familiar surroundings, but Adrien looked around as if it was a new environment for him.

“Wow, you guys have changed things up a bit since I’ve last been here, huh?”, Adrien said.

“Yeah, we got some new furniture and redid the floor a bit,” Alya said. “Other than that though, it’s basically the same.”

“Marinette! Nino!”

The two looked down to see Ella and Etta at their feet, each one grabbing onto one of their legs.

“Hey there little dudettes,” Nino said, patting their heads.

“Hi girls,” Marinette said, kneeling down to their level. “I can tell you’re both very excited to see us again.”

“Yes! We haven’t seen you in forever,” Ella held her arms out above her head.

Etta looked over at Adrien curiously. “Who is this?”, she asked, pointing at him.

Alya pushed her younger sister’s hand down, wagging her own finger in the air. “Now what have I told you about pointing?”, she said, raising a brow at her.

“Sorry, Alya,” she held her hands behind her back.

“It’s okay,” Alya said, booping her nose. She gestured to Adrien, who politely waved. “Anyway, this is Adrien. You guys remember him, don’t you?”

The twins tapped their fingers on their chins simultaneously. “Oh! He’s the boy from tv!”, Ella exclaimed. “He plays Chat Noir!”

Adrien spoke up. “Yep, that’s me,” he said. “It’s nice to see that you guys enjoy that movie.”

Alya pinched the bridge of her nose. “Oh believe me, they adore it,” she said. “I’ve seen it at least fifty times already.”

“Oh! Oh! Can we watch it again tonight, Alya? Please?”, Etta asked.

“I suppose so, but the four of us are going to go hang out in my room for a little while,” she said. “So have Nora put it on before she heads out to her match.”

The twins nodded eagerly as they ran off to their other sister’s room.

Alya turned back to her friends. “Alright, now that those little munchkins are out of our hair, we can get this party started,” she said.

“So, what do we do first?”, Adrien asked. “Do we need to be in our pajamas?”

“You don’t really have to be in them just yet,” she told him. “Wait until it gets dark if you want.”

He nodded and the group headed into Alya’s bedroom, which was pretty big. She had a window right next to her desk, which held her computer. Adrien remembered being in the room as Chat Noir, back when they were trying to get Mister Damocles to stop trying to be a superhero.

Once Nino, Marinette, and Adrien set their bags down on the floor, Alya spoke up. “Alright, while you guys make yourselves comfy, I’ll go fetch the snacks.”

As she left the room, the three took their shoes off. Marinette settled down on the bed while Nino and Adrien opted to sit on the floor.

Marinette scooted down to the edge of the bed, flopping down onto her stomach. Her eyes glanced to Adrien’s socks, which were covered in a pattern of red with black polka dots. “H-Hey, Adrien,” she poked his shoulder with a finger. When he looked back at her, she spoke again. “Are those Ladybug socks?”

He looked at his feet and then back at her. “Oh yeah, they are,” he said, smiling. “I’m a huge fan.”

She tried and failed to keep her cheeks from heating up. “Oh really? That’s awesome,” she said, returning his smile.

He rubbed the back of his neck, his cheeks spotting the same shade of faint pink as her own. “Heh, yeah,” he said. “I admit, I probably own more merch for her than Chat Noir does.”

“Totally understandable,” she said. “I wish you’d have told me earlier. I would’ve worn my Chat Noir socks.”

She giggled as his expression shifted to a mildly surprised one. He opened his mouth to say something, but was interrupted by Alya coming back into the room.

“Alright, I’ve got popcorn, candy, chips and drinks,” she said as she pointed to all the food on the tray. “Help yourselves while I put the movie on.”

Marinette stayed in her spot as she watched the boys grab their treats. Adrien looked a bit puzzled as he tried to decide which ones to eat first. She knew he rarely was allowed to have junk food, so she was sure he would enjoy it.

He grabbed a bag of cheese puffs and immediately opened them. The delight on his face as he stuck one in his mouth was enough to make her heart flutter. His smile and the way his cheeks puffed out a bit when he was happy was something she had only begun to notice recently.

“Hey, Marinette.”

She shook her head, snapping back to reality as she heard Alya calling her name. “O-Oh hey, what’s up?”

“Listen, I kind of want Nino to sit up here with me so we can...”, she wrapped her arms around herself. “You know.”

“Oh! Right, of course,” she got off the bed and moved down onto the floor to sit next to Adrien.

“Thanks, girl,” Alya said as she settled down on the bed.

Adrien was still munching on his cheese puffs, his lips now covered in a thin layer of orange dust. Marinette couldn’t help but laugh a little, causing him to look at her.

“Have you ever had those before?”, she asked him.

“*The delight on his face as he stuck one in his mouth was enough to make her heart flutter.*”

He shook his head. “Maybe a few times when I was really little,” he said. “My mom used to let me have treats sometimes. My father though...”

“He’s very strict,” she said, rummaging through the tray of food. “Especially with you being a model and all.”

“Yup,” he grabbed a napkin to wipe his mouth and orange fingers. “Anyways, I’m super excited to see this movie.” He scooted back a bit so that he was sitting up against the bed.

“Oh yeah, me too,” Marinette said. She followed suit and leaned against the bed as well, moving the tray of snacks so that it was between them.

Alya turned the lights off so that the room was illuminated only by the television. She and Nino piled up some pillows on her bed so that they were propped up.

She relaxed against the pillows as he threw his arms around her, laying his head in the crook of her shoulder.

“You couldn’t wait, could you?”, she whispered.

“Nope,” he said softly.

She gave him a little smile and a quick kiss on the nose before turning her head back to the screen.

Marinette watched the screen intently. Alya had chosen an animated movie, though it was one filled with a lot of adventure and romance.

As the movie played, the teens found themselves getting sucked deeper into it. Every now and then, Marinette would look at Adrien next to her to see his reaction to certain things. During the happy moments, the edges of his lips would curl into a smile so big that she thought they’d fall off his face. She unconsciously found herself inching closer and closer to him until their hands brushed against each other.

When the two leads finally confessed their love to one another, Marinette gasped as she felt Adrien grab her hand. She held back another gasp as he leaned his head against hers.

“This is so cute, isn’t it, Marinette?”, he whispered, his eyes illuminated by the television screen.

“*Every now and then, Marinette would look at Adrien next to her to see his reaction to certain things.*”

She was glad that they were currently in a semi-dark room because her face was an absolute forest fire. “Y-Yeah, it is,” she said. Even though her skin also felt like fire, she took it upon herself to lean further into him.

With their hands still clasped together, she found herself laying her head on his chest. The soft cotton of his shirt made him feel like a pillow. She could feel his heart beating in his chest, making her feel relaxed.

Adrien examined the position they were currently in. He wasn’t exactly sure what had come over him in that moment, but he didn’t mind it. Marinette looked so small when she was pressed up against his chest. The aroma from her hair smelled of vanilla and peach.

Alya was no longer paying attention to the movie as she was now watching her friends intently. Nino noticed it and nudged her arm. “Hey, what’s up?”

Her eyes grew wide. “Do you not see them?!”, she said, pointing towards their friends.

He looked forward, examining them. With only the light from the television illuminating them, their forms made a silhouette. Marinette leaned into Adrien’s chest while he laid his head on top of hers.

“Aww, how cute,” he whispered, admiring his friends’ closeness.

Alya tapped her chin with a finger. “I might have an idea,” she said quietly.

Her boyfriend eyed her. “What kind of idea?”

She glanced back at the television, taking notice that the movie was almost over. “Well...considering how close those two are to each other at this current moment,” she began. “How about once this movie ends, I initiate a little game of ‘Seven Minutes in Heaven’?”

Nino raised a brow. “You mean you want to put them in a closet together?!”, he said, his voice getting a bit louder.

“Shh,” she put a finger on his lips. “Come on, think about it. Marinette is always afraid to confess to Adrien because she thinks he’s cute. So, if she can’t see him...”

A lightbulb went off in his head. “Then maybe she’ll have the confidence to confess,” he said. “I like the way you think.”

They both looked back at the television, noticing that the credits were beginning to play. Alya took the opportunity to get up and turn on the lights. As the room lit up once again, Marinette and Adrien rubbed their eyes.

Marinette felt her face burning as she looked up at Adrien, who still had an arm wrapped around her. She was surprised to see that his face had a similar shade of crimson, along with a little smile.

He pulled back when he noticed her looking at him. “Heh, sorry about that,” he said, rubbing the back of his neck. “I guess I got a bit caught up in the movie.”

Marinette sat up. “N-No, it’s okay,” she said. “It was. Um.” She looked away. “It was nice.”

Adrien opened his mouth to respond, but Alya spoke first.

“Hey, so Nino and I were talking and we think it would be really fun to play a little game,” she said as her lips twisted into a sly grin.

“What kind of game?”, Marinette asked, raising a brow.

“Have you guys ever heard of ‘Seven Minutes in Heaven’?”, she asked. She watched as Adrien shook his head, while Marinette’s blush deepened. “Adrien, you need me to explain?”

“Please,” he looked at her with a confused expression.

“So basically,” Alya began to explain. “It’s where two people go into a closet for seven minutes. You can do anything you want in there, but remember that you only have a limited time.”

Adrien smiled and looked at Marinette. “That seems kinda fun, don’t you think?”, he asked. His face softened when he noticed the worried expression she had on her face. “Hey, I’ll do it with you if it makes you feel any better.” He threw an arm across her shoulders once again, giving her a small smile.

Marinette tried to hold the squeak that was forming at the back of her throat. Her face burned and her stomach felt as though it had been bent into a tight knot. Oh, if only he knew that he was the exact reason why she was so nervous. Looking into his emerald green eyes and the softness of his pink cheeks was enough to make her want to jump up and flee the room as fast as she could.

There was something different inside of her at that moment, though. Of all the times Alya had tried to push her closer towards Adrien, this one may actually be a good one. The situation they were in just moments ago made something click.

Adrien had moved closer to her. Even now, he was looking at her with an expression of pure sincerity, as if he really was worried about her. Her heart pounded so fast that she could feel it thrumming in her ears. She realized that he was still waiting for an answer.

Shaking her head as she came out of her thoughts, she spoke. “Y-Yeah, maybe that’ll help me feel better,” she said. “T-Thank you.”

He gave her another smile, this one filled with happiness. “You’re very welcome, Marinette.”

Their gaze broke long enough for them to notice that their friends had already started the game without them.

Alya’s closet door was shut and their ears could pick up the faintest of whispers emanating from inside it.

“What do you think they’re doing in there?”, Adrien whispered.

“I really couldn’t tell ya,” Marinette said, also whispering. “Probably plotting something.”

Adrien flashed her a playful grin. “Maybe they’re plotting to put us in there next.”

Marinette felt herself freeze, with the inevitable blush returning to her face. “Heh, yeah just imagine that,” she said nervously.

He felt his heart drop a bit in his chest once he noticed how scared she looked. “Hey, don’t worry,” he said, placing his free hand on top of one of hers. “It’s just a little game, we’ll be fine.”

She nodded, biting her lip as she tried to take in deep breaths. Once again, she took note of the position they were in. Adrien still had his arm across her shoulders, now with his hand nearly in her grasp, all while looking at her with those gorgeous green eyes and a smile that sent her heart flying into the air. “Right. Just a game,” she said, letting out a nervous giggle.

“*He felt his heart drop a bit in his chest once he noticed how scared she looked.*”

It was at that moment when their friends decided to emerge from the closet. Alya walked out, while Nino fell over onto his back as he let out a loving sigh. She looked at him and laughed. “Take a look at this goofball,” she glanced over at Marinette and Adrien. “He could hardly handle being in there with me.”

Marinette took a closer look at Nino. At first she had thought maybe he was sick or had gotten claustrophobic, but then she noticed the marks of lipstick on his face. She glanced at Adrien, trying to see if maybe he noticed it too.

“So...much...fluffiness,” Nino said, trying his best to sound overly dramatic. He turned his head towards his friends, smirking when he noticed them looking at him. “Alya is a great kisser, you guys.”

Alya laughed as a small blush formed on her cheeks. “Thank you, sweetheart,” she said. “Alright, now it’s y’all’s turn.” She pointed towards the closet while looking back at her friends.

Nino finally stood up and walked over to stand next to Alya. “Yeah, you guys go on ahead,” he said. “We’ll be right here.”

Adrien and Marinette exchanged looks. He took her hand and placed it into his, giving it a little squeeze. “Come on, Marinette,” he said, giving her a reassuring glance and beginning to get up from the floor.

He stood up and Marinette followed, their hands still intertwined. They made their way into the dark closet, closing the door behind them. She let go of his hand and sat down on one side of the closet. Adrien followed suit and sat across from her.

“*Adrien and Marinette exchanged looks. He took her hand and placed it into his, giving it a little squeeze.*”

Marinette could still feel the anxiety building up inside of her. Trying to handle herself while knowing that the love of her life was sitting less than three feet away from her was almost impossible. The teens sat in silence for a few moments before Adrien spoke up.

“We can just sit here if you want,” he said. “You’re really unsure about all of this, aren’t you?”

Despite being in the dark, she kept her eyes closed. The small amount of light coming from the bedroom on the other side was enough to barely make out a thin outline. She could tell he was sitting criss cross, most likely looking at her too.

It was then that something else clicked in her mind. One reason why she’d never been able to talk to Adrien properly was because of how adorable he was. His looks would stop her in her tracks every single time. His blond hair that enveloped the essence of sunshine, the way his plump cheeks were always just begging to be squeezed. Then there was her favorite: his smile.

She shut her eyes harder, taking a deep breath. Her body felt hot as a surge of confidence flowed through her. Before she had time to think, her mouth started moving.

“Adrien, I-I,” she began to speak, her heart feeling like it was going to bust out of her chest. “I love you.”

Adrien’s ears perked up, his mind trying to process what he had just heard. “W-What did you just say?”

Marinette took another deep breath. “I said...”, she could feel tears forming in her eyes. “I love you.”

He sat up straight, mouth agape. He was glad she couldn’t see his expression at that moment because he probably looked completely dumbfounded. Marinette, his very good friend, just said that she loved him? “You...you love me?”, he asked. “As more than a friend?”

She knew he couldn’t see her nodding, but she did anyway. “Yes, that’s what I said,” she clarified. With her confession finally out in the open, now came the anticipation of his response. “I-I know that you might not feel the same way, but I just really wanted you to know that.”

Now came Adrien’s turn to feel conflicted. He knew that he loved Ladybug, but... she didn’t love him back. She loved someone else. If he really loved Ladybug, then why was his heart beating so fast right now?

Marinette, his friend he met on the first day of school. A wonderful girl who had a passion for fashion and who cared about everyone more than herself. She really was beautiful, kind and very sweet.

“Adrien?”, her voice interrupted his thoughts.

He could give her an entire speech about how he loved another girl and how that girl didn’t love him back. He could tell her all kinds of things that would then turn into a long winded explanation on why he does return her feelings.

In that moment though, Adrien knew words couldn’t express what he wanted to say.

He felt around on the floor, making sure there was nothing around him. After scooting forward just a bit, he could feel her legs just in front of him. Lifting up one of his hands, he touched her soft hair. He slid his hand down to her face, where he used the back of his hand to caress one of her cheeks.

The heat from her blush deepened as she felt his hand touching her face. Her heart-beat was thudding in her ears at this point. She could see him leaning forward a bit and she braced herself for impact.

Adrien found his way to her lips, which he caressed with one of his fingers. Maneuvering in the dark was rather difficult, but he managed to do it. Leaning his head forward slightly, he gently pressed his lips to hers. He expected her to jump back in surprise or even push him off of her.

Instead, Marinette found herself leaning into him. His hand was still stroking her cheek. She put one hand around his back, pulling him closer to her.

Her mind flooded with thoughts. The Adrien Agreste was kissing her. His soft lips were pressed against hers, making her feel as though she were floating next to him on a cloud of bliss.

Not only that, but he loved her too. Adrien was in love with her. He definitely loved her--she could feel that affection flowing through her veins.

She wished she could make this kiss last forever and always feel the softness of his lips brushing against hers.

At that moment light flooded the closet.

A sudden squeal came from her left, causing both her and Adrien to jump back. Their eyes met once again, this time widened in surprise. His cheeks matched hers as they sported a bright pink color.

They simultaneously looked over to see that the door had been opened. Standing there were their friends, whose faces now had the biggest grins Marinette had ever seen.

All she could think to herself was: were we actually in there that long?

“Oh my gosh,” Alya exclaimed, bouncing on her toes as she tried and failed to contain her excitement. “This is exactly what I was hoping would happen.”

Part of Marinette felt like she should be angry or even upset at her best friend. The other part of her refused to think that way because she was filled with a lot of happiness and relief.

“Hehe, yeah,” Adrien muttered as he rubbed the back of his neck. His eyes drifted back to Marinette. “So um, I guess you liked it?”

“Y-Yes, I did,” she said. She knew her face probably looked absolutely ridiculous because of how much she was smiling. “Thank you, Adrien.”

He looked at her, an eyebrow raised in confusion. “For wha-“

Before he could say anything else, Alya spoke once again. “Alright you two, I think it’s about time we all got ready for bed.”

The others nodded. Adrien stood up first, holding out a hand to Marinette. She grabbed it without hesitation, squeezing it a bit as he helped her up.

Adrien took a moment to notice the slight redness in her eyes and gently used his thumb to wipe them. “You okay?”, he asked.

Marinette nodded. “Yes, I am,” she stood on her tiptoes to kiss his cheek. “Thank you.”

He returned her gesture by leaning down a bit to kiss her cheek as well. “You’re very welcome.”

They separated long enough to change into their pajamas. Adrien helped Nino set up a pallet of blankets on the floor for him and Marinette to share.

“Adrien stood up first, holding out a hand to Marinette.”

They didn’t mind letting Alya and Nino have Alya’s bed, especially since her parents didn’t mind them sleeping together if Adrien and Marinette were also there.

Marinette grabbed some pillows and a blanket and laid down next to Adrien. He welcomed her with a smile as she scooted in close to him.

Once Alya turned out the lights, everything began to settle down a bit.

“Goodnight Marinette, Adrien,” Alya and Nino called.

“Goodnight guys,” Adrien said. He placed an arm across Marinette’s waist, drawing her a bit closer to him.

She did the same and put a hand on his head, twirling her fingers around in his hair. “So um, are we...ya know,” she hesitated a bit. “Official?”

“You mean like, boyfriend and girlfriend?”, he said. “Yeah, I guess we are.”

She was thankful it was dark because she knew her cheeks were burning once again. “Wow, it’s crazy, right?”, she asked. “That you’re my boyfriend now.”

He laughed. “Yeah, but a good kind of crazy,” he said. “Hey, I also meant to ask you earlier. What did you thank me for?”

She took her hand out of his hair and placed it on his cheek. “For loving me.”

Now it was Adrien’s turn to shed a few tears. The wetness dropped down his cheek as she caressed it. How was she so sweet? “You’re very welcome, Marinette,” he said. “I’m so sorry for not realizing how I feel about you sooner.”

She wiped the tears from his cheeks. “It’s okay, all that matters now is that you know,” she said.

The space between them closed as they shared another kiss. This one felt a bit more tender than the last.

Even after they pulled apart, they continued to hold each other close. Adrien wrapped his arms around her, putting one hand in her hair and the other around her back. Marinette threw her arms around his neck.

“Goodnight, Marinette,” he said, lovingly. “I love you.”

She wanted to cry after hearing those words escape his lips. “I love you, too,” she said. “Goodnight.”

As they held each other close and began to fall asleep, Marinette couldn’t help but think about how crazy of a day it had been. Just a day before, she had been worried about Adrien judging her for her pajamas or making a fool of herself in front of him.

Instead, she had gotten something out of this sleepover that she had never imagined she would get: his love. Who’d have thought that a sleepover, of all things, could help bring them together?

Perhaps all they had needed was a little push and a closet full of secrets.

THE END



White Roses · Momo Tamago

Confusion and Clarity

by: Purpleflower04

BETA: Sarah27519

When Marinette wishes on a star that Adrien knew the truth, Adrien's eyes are opened to who she is under the mask. Fortunately for her, he is the same partner she could count on while fighting akumas.

Marinette stood in the rain after detransforming. She remembered the day she fell for Adrien. Tears slowly rolled down her face as a shooting star streaked through the sky.

Adrien likes Kagami. He only likes me when I'm Ladybug. I wish Adrien knew the truth.

She never believed in wishing on shooting stars, but she had nothing to lose. It wasn't like Adrien was ever going to know who she was Ladybug anyway.



Adrien's face lit up. "Plagg! I think I know who Ladybug really is!"

"I was about to say you're not supposed to know who Ladybug is under the mask, but she's also the guardian, so you can try and figure it out if you want," Plagg explained.

"Really? You'll let me figure this out? You're usually not ok with this," Adrien said.

"You were going to figure it out eventually," Plagg shrugged.

"I really want to hint at it. Next time I see Marinette, I'm definitely going to hint it," Adrien said.

The next day, they were back at school. *Hmmm, I've got to make a kitty face and maybe meow.*

Marinette arrived at school, relieved to see no Chloe or Lila in sight. As soon as she came close enough, Adrien got nervous, but managed to make a kitty face at her.

Marinette saw the unusual face. *Why is Adrien doing this to me? He went from thinking we're friends to making kitty faces. Is that what he does to really close friends?*

Adrien saw Marinette's confusion. *She doesn't know I'm Chat. I need to make it more obvious to her.* Because of this, he mewed in a kitten-like tone.

Marinette became even more confused. *Maybe patrolling with Chat will make me forget this.* She slowly walked to her first class, wondering if anything crazier would happen. Then Adrien sat next to her. *He acted like a cat and now he's sitting next to me. What exactly is going on?*

Adrien tried to think of more ways to show her that he was Chat. *Maybe I should purr at lunch. Actually, she seems a little creeped out. For now, I can just rub her. Just a little.* As soon as Adrien started, Marinette wondered what he was doing, but she leaned on him. When class actually started, she sat up straight, and Adrien stopped rubbing her arm with his head.

During lunch, he sat next to her again. This time, he purred on her shoulder. *Awww... Adrien has been acting cute lately, even though it's getting creepy. I wonder what's gotten into him. Well, I've got to enjoy every moment of this while it lasts.* Marinette leaned back onto his shoulder. She closed her eyes and smiled. Adrien put his arm around her. Her skin tingled and she smiled more.

Once lunch was over, they walked together to their next class, and he sat next to her again. *Ok, now what's really going on with Adrien? He's been acting like a cat. Why a cat? Why is he acting strangely at all? I guess maybe Adrien knows the truth, but why be this obvious?*

"Marinette, want to hang out after school?" Adrien asked.

“Sure. I’d love to!” Marinette said.

How am I able to form sentences in front of him now? Then again, he seemed to like me. At least I can talk to him without stuttering.

Class started, and they both paid attention.



After school ended, Adrien went straight to Marinette. “We should hang out at the Seine. Would you like to do that?” He suggested.

“That sounds good to me!” Marinette said.

“*We should hang out at the Seine.
Would you like to do that?*”

They strolled to the Seine. Adrien was perfectly happy with how things were turning out. Marinette’s hands were coated with sweat. *Does this mean he likes me? Was I wrong? What’s going on??? I guess I’ll figure out soon.*

I’ll take Marinette on the civilian version of the patrol route. Then she’ll really suspect something if she hasn’t already.

Adrien started at the Seine and took Marinette on the route of Ladybug and Chat Noir’s patrols, except on the ground or the closest they could be to the locations. He stopped at the fifth location, since they couldn’t just jump around without their superpowers. *Why is Adrien treating this like a patrol? He correctly guessed all these places. It’s almost like he’s Chat Noir!*

Pffft! There’s no way he’s Chat Noir! Maybe he’s seen Chat from time to time in different places and he figured out the patrol route? He may be smart, but no one, not even Max could piece this together! Maybe I can hint back that I’m Ladybug? It seems risky.

“Adrien, this route seems familiar to me. Have you walked this route before or did you take this route by accident?”

“Well, I stumbled upon this route by accident, but I like walking through here often,” Adrien spoke, saying a half truth.

Likes to walk through here? Hmm... his life is busy, but he walks here often. Is he Chat? Wait, but there's no way! He can't be that busy and live a double life. Maybe it's someone else that looks like him. Definitely not Felix, he's just too mean to be a miraculous holder. He'd have to get it by accident. But then how'd Adrien know these routes?

...This is confusing me.



That night, Ladybug and Chat met at the Eiffel Tower to start patrol. “Ready to have a little fun, M’Lady?” Chat asked.

“Yeah, but Chat, can I talk to you first?”

“What’s up, bugaboo?” Chat said, concerned.

“This boy in my class was acting strangely around me. It wasn’t like he had a crush on me. He was just... acting like a cat. I really like him, and it’s cute, but it also was a little creepy,” Ladybug said.

“I don’t think there’s anything you need to worry about. I think you might be talking about someone I know, and that’s normal for him,” Chat said, before taking a deep breath. “I also need to talk to you about something. I know who you are under the mask, and it’s only fair if I show you who I am, M’Lady.”

“No, Chat. We need to keep our identities a secret.”

“Fu isn’t here to make the rules, remember? You are the guardian, and it’s time things changed. Also, since you’re the guardian, you can’t just transform every time I need you for something other than akuma battles,” Chat said.

“Oh yeah, you’re right. I guess I just got used to keeping our identities a secret,” Ladybug said.

“So, can I reveal myself, purrincess?”

“Alright, but we need to hide.”

They found the nearest alley and ran to the end of it.

“Here’s who’s under the mask. Plagg, claws in.”

Chat detransformed into Adrien.

“I knew it! That’s why you were making kitten faces at me!” Ladybug said, everything clearing up.

“I guess I should confirm what you already know. Spots off.”

“So you are Marinette! I was making the faces towards you on purpose, thinking that you were Ladybug, but you didn’t get it. All those things that happened were hints.” Adrien said.

“I’m glad that my partner is the same boy I’m in love with.”

“I’m glad my princess loves me back.”

THE END



Story Prompt Challenge

Looking for inspiration? Try these prompts and tag [@adriennettezine](#) on Tumblr.

Marinette was the best empathic investigator there was until an accident labeled her as damaged goods. No shielder wanted to work with her. She continued on her own... until one day, her emotional shield collapsed, and she was left vulnerable. She was defenseless until a shielder named Adrien shielded her empathically. They start to work together. Adrien admitted to her he was an EFS (emotional flare shielder). It's why no one would work with him.

One case caught their attention, but Adrien has a personal connection to the case and doesn't want Marinette to find out. He has to decide whether or not to face his fear or pick up and leave her alone.



You Are My Sunshine · Clothed-Daffodil

You Are My Sunshine

by: Cassandra S. Fisher

BETA: Chatonne-Rousse, Sarah27519, Raven

While on a Girl's Night they play Truth or Dare, Alix dares Marinette to tell Adrien how she really feels about him. Will Marinette step up to the plate or will she strike out?

“Marinette, I promise it will be fun. I know you never had a reading before, but what is the harm in trying it?” Alya asked her best friend. Both Alya and Marinette had decided to have a girls' weekend. Friday morning was for Marinette and Alya, but the night and the next two days were with their girlfriends.

Marinette's eyebrows scrunched together; this was something fun that both could do, but she wasn't sure about it. At the moment, they stood in front of Madam Michelle's Shop. A few moments passed by before Marinette made up her mind. She grabbed Alya's hand and went inside.

The shop was a perfect size, not too small to make you feel squished like a sardine in a can and not too big, where you think there's too much space in the room. Marinette and Alya looked around the room. On the walls were posters of different places in the world. Alya was sure she would be visiting some of those destinations in her lifetime; she hoped to visit them with Nino.

On the other hand, Marinette had her eyes on the poster with mountains on it; underneath read Alaska. Marinette hoped she could visit Alaska with Adrien someday and maybe even with their family if she married him.

There were different items set around the room to make the room feel inviting. The shop looked like a regular business; there were no items that said anything other than it was a business. A few moments passed by. The curtain which hung to divide the front from the back opened. There stood a young woman dressed as a nomad.

“Miss Cesaire and Miss Dupain-Cheng, it’s nice to see you, I’ve been expecting both of you,” the young woman said.

Both Marinette and Alya’s eyes widened a bit in surprise; neither one of them had met the young woman before; plus, they hadn’t talked to anyone who suggested coming here, so how did she know their names?

Alya eyed the young woman cautiously. She wasn’t sure whether to believe her or not.

“How, do you know our names?” Alya questioned.

“Always the curious one, Miss Cesaire. The power that gives me both of your names.” the young woman told her.

“Are you the real deal? I am not sure about it,” Alya told her.

“Well, I can not force you to believe in anything. I will let you make up your mind.”

“*Marinette hoped she could visit Alaska with Adrien someday...*”

“Alya, keep an open mind. Remember, you are the one who convinced me to come here in the first place,” Marinette reminded her. Alya looked at her then let out a sigh.

“Yes, you are right,” Alya started, then she looked back at the young woman.

“Is your name Michelle?”

“Yes it is, it’s my given name, why do you ask?”

“Just curious, that all,” Alya said. She saw Michelle, who nodded slightly.

“So, who is going to go first?” Michelle asked as she looked at both of them.

“I’ll go first since I suggested coming here,” Alya said.

“Okay, do you want me to stay with you while she gives you your reading?” Marinette asked Alya.

Alya looked at her.

“You can stay, we are best friends, after all. I am not going to hide anything from you.” Alya confidently told her.

“You can stay for mine as well,” Marinette told her.

“Okay, girl. Let’s do this.” Alya said.

“So what reading do you two would like to have done on you,” Michelle asked them. Marinette and Alya looked at each other.

“Can we both have the crystal ball reading, please?” Alya asked.

“Sure.”

Alya took out her wallet and paid Michelle. Alya looked at Marinette.

“Girl, this is my treat, so don’t worry about paying,” Alya told her.

“Thanks,” Marinette replied quietly.

“Okay, let’s get going,” Alya said, as she looked at Michelle to lead the way to the backroom.

Michelle, followed by Alya and Marinette, led to a room in the back. It had a table in the corner of the room. It was where you had to sit on the floor. The table cloth covering the table was red. There was a crystal ball in front of one of the seats. Michelle went over and sat in front of the crystal ball.

“Please take a seat,” Michelle said.

Both Alya and Marinette took a seat across from her.

“Is it okay if I change my reading? I would like to use the Tarot Cards.” Alya asked.

“Sure,” Michelle said, as she put the crystal ball on the shelf next to the table. She reached to the shelf below and pulled out the Tarot cards.

It did not take long for Michelle to be ready to read Alya’s fortune. Alya cut the cards; it was then Michelle took the cards and laid them down in her spread. When she placed the last card down, Michelle let out a hum.

“What is it?” Alya asked.

“Your spread is interesting,” Michelle commented.

“How so? Alya asked.

“The path you are on will lead you to have hardship before you end up happy with the one you love,” Michelle told her.

“Can I ask what kind of hardship are we talking about so that I know what to expect? Alya asked her.

“There will be another person who wants the attention of the one you love,” Michelle said as she flipped over another card from the deck; she held in her other hand and placed it on one of the cards. “You and your loved one will be separated for a little while due to family matters. In the end, you two will be happy.”

Alya’s eyebrows furrowed together. The reading was good, but it wasn’t the reading she was expecting. Her mind was reeling from the information told to her.

“Is there anything you would like to ask?” Michelle asked her.

Honestly, Alya could say she was not a hundred percent that this reading would come true. Nino was who she loved. She didn’t see a future without him in it. Just knowing there was trouble ahead, it would be good to prevent it from happening. At the moment she didn’t know how, but she would figure it out.

“I am good with my reading. I do not have any questions.” Alya said.

Alya didn’t want to know any more than she already knew.

“Marinette, it’s your turn now,” Alya said.

If she did end up returning, she would be more than happy to pay to get answered.

“Okay. Alya, when you do have any questions feel free to come and talk to me,” Michelle said as she took out her business card and handed it to Alya. Alya took the card and put it in her wallet.

“Thank you, and I will,” Alya said, as she and Marinette watched her put the tarot cards away and replaced them with the crystal ball.

“Marinette, please, close your eyes and think about the young man you love,” Michelle told her.

Alya watched as Marinette did what Michelle told her to do. Alya saw Michelle’s lips moving, but she couldn’t hear what she was saying.

Alya watched as the crystal ball got foggy; there was no way this was real. Alya squinted her eyes and looked carefully at the crystal ball to see if there were any trick wires or something that could make the crystal ball go foggy like it was now. There was nothing she could see.

“You may open your eyes now,” Michelle said as both she and Marinette opened their eyes. Their eyes glued to the crystal ball.

“I see you care about this young man a lot. Both of you have gone through so much already. There’s been some hardship for both of you, but you’ve been there for each other. In doing so, this strengthened your bond with one another.” Michelle started as she peered into the crystal ball. A small smile appeared on her lips.

“I see a secret hidden away, but when the time comes, the secret will reveal itself.”

“Exactly what secret is she talking about?” Alya whispered to Marinette, as not to interrupt the reading.

“I have no idea what she means by that,” Marinette squeaked out.

Alya raised one of her eyebrows. Marinette said nothing. Alya gave Marinette a we are going to discuss this later look. Marinette gulped but then turned her attention back to Michelle.

“Is there anything you can tell me about his future I should watch out for?” Marinette asked curiously.

Michelle moved her hand above the crystal ball. She hummed for a few seconds.

“*I see you care about this young man a lot...*”

“He will get some devastating news; it will give him some financial problems. The best thing to do is be there for him. Help him when he needs it. Do not let him run away from what happened to him.”

“Do you know what will happen to him?”

“All I can say is that the news has something to do with his father.”

“His father?” Marinette questioned.

“Yes, I am not able to see what it will be, but I advise you if you love him, stay by his side no matter what.”

“I plan on spending the rest of my life with him.”

“Marinette, seriously, I thought you liked him. I didn’t know it was that serious.” Alya exclaimed quietly.

Marinette looked at Alya; heat rose to her cheeks.

“Umm... .yes, it is serious. I see my future with Adrien. I will be thrilled if I marry him and live happily ever after. Of course, I know life does not go according to plan. If he ends up with someone else, I will be happy for him.” Marinette said.

A gasp came from Michelle’s lips. Both Marinette and Alya looked at her.

“What is it?” Marinette asked.

“I see there is someone who will try and break the two of you apart.”

“Lila.” Marinette and Alya said in unison. Michelle’s eyebrow rose at the name Lila.

“Don’t worry, I know how to handle her,” Marinette said.

“This young girl has gone after him since she met him. I can assume that is right?” Michelle asked.

“If he ends up with someone else, I will be happy for him.”

“Yes, you are right, and she has tried everything, even lying to others. Marinette knows it, and I know it after I did some fact-checking on some information she gave us,” Alya said. Alya saw Marinette, who smiled.

Marinette was happy; her best friend was on her side and not under Lila’s control; if she were, this girls’ night would not be happening at all.

“This young girl will soon get what is coming to her. You need not worry about her for much longer. The lies she has told to others will soon catch up with her. She is just digging herself a deeper hole to bury herself in, metaphorically speaking,” Michelle told Marinette and Alya.

“Good, we won’t have to worry about her,”

“Yeah,” Marinette said, as she looked at Michelle. “Can I ask when will this be over with? The drama, I mean?” Marinette asked her.

Michelle moved her hand around above the crystal ball. The fog cleared, and the images were clear.

There stood Adrien and Marinette in formal wear, Marinette was in Adrien’s arms. Marinette leaned against his chest; there was a smile on both their faces. The question faded away. “When and where is this?” Marinette’s stunned voice asked.

“I am not clear when or where this will be happening,” Michelle admitted.

“Not everything can be known in this world.”

“At least I know now; I have this moment to look forward to,” Marinette admitted.

“You will have many more happy memories with him.”

“I know I will,” Marinette happily said as she had a smile on her face.

Suddenly the crystal ball went foggy again. Then, a few moments later, it was clear. The image of Adrien and Marinette dancing disappeared.

“What happened?” Marinette asked in a worried voice.

Both Alya and Marinette looked at Michelle with a concerned look on their faces.

“I am not exactly sure, and I just know that what we saw in the crystal ball today was what we needed to see. It might not be the right time to see what lies beyond this time at the moment. You just have to be patient to see the rest. A place and time for things to happen will show itself when it is ready.” Michelle said as she gave Marinette her business card.

“Thank you for doing the reading,” Marinette said with a smile on her face.

“You’re welcome,” Michelle said as they left. “Come back and visit soon,”

“We will.” Marinette and Alya promised in unison.

They walked out of the shop and headed to get ready for the sleepover they were going to have in a few hours.



Girls’ night was in full swing. They had a three day weekend, so it was going to be a good weekend for them. Their plans for this weekend were movie watching, game playing, having a spa night, and bonding with one another.

The girls invited were Juleka, Rose, Mylene, and Alix. The movie was all set, food was there, and once they were ready, the fun began.

“Why don’t we play Truth or Dare while we’re eating?” Alix suggested.

Everyone looked over at Marinette. Since she was hosting, then she was in charge.

“I don’t see why we can’t do that, but there are going to be rules that we have to follow,” Marinette started as everyone nodded their heads.

“There is no going too far with any dare. If the dare is going to hurt someone or someone’s feelings, then that will not happen. What happens here stays here. It does not leave this room.”

“Okay,” everyone said in unison.

“So, who will go first?” Marinette asked.

“I’ll go first,” Alya started as they all got comfortable with their food in front of them.

“Marinette, truth or dare?” Marinette looked at Alya with the expression of really on her face. Marinette thought about it.

“Truth.”

“Who do you love?” Alya asked her.

“Adrien,” Marinette instantly replied, her hand flew to cover her mouth. Somehow she unconsciously answered the question without meaning to. Everyone let out a giggle.

“Girl, we already knew that,” Alix told her. Marinette’s cheeks got warmer.

“I know, but I didn’t know I was going to say it automatically,” Marinette admitted.

“Alya that wasn’t fair, we already knew that,” Alix told her. Alya just shrugged her shoulder.

“Okay, Juleka, truth or dare?” Marinette asked.

“Dare.”

“I dare you to kiss the person you like on the cheek,” Marinette said.

A few moments passed before Juleka crawled to Rose’s side; she then kissed Rose on her left cheek. The shock on Rose’s face told them everything. Juleka froze for a second, but before she could move, Rose leaned forward and kissed Juleka on the lips. It was just a peck, but they could see both girl’s cheeks with color added to them.

“Wow, congratulations,” Mylene said with a smile on her face.

“Thanks,” Juleka quietly said as she went back to her seat. The game continued, and soon it was Alix’s turn.

“Marinette, Truth, or Dare?” Alix asked.

“Dare.”

“I dare you to call Adrien and tell him I love you,” Alix said with a glint in her eyes.

“Not happening,” Marinette said.

“It’s a dare, Marinette, you can’t, not do it,” Alya told her.

“We can wait until you do it.”

“Why?” Marinette asked, looking at her friends.

“Don’t you want to know if he returns your feelings or not?” Juleka asked.

“Yes, but...”

“But... nothing, girl. If he doesn’t return your feelings, then we are here for you,” Alya told her.

“Okay, I will do it,” Marinette said as she picked up her cell phone and dialed Adrien’s number. Adrien picked up on the first ring.

“Hey Marinette, is there something you need?” Marinette looked at her friends, and they nodded their heads.

“Adrien,” Marinette started as she closed her eyes. “I love you.”

There. She had told him, and now she waited for the truth. This news was going to make her the happiest girl on earth, or she would be a heartbroken girl. She’d be miserable for a little while, but Marinette would grow as a person once she experienced heartache. Marinette waited for his answer.

“I love you too,” Adrien replied.

Marinette’s heart skipped a few beats. She was stunned. The boy, soon to be man, loved her back. She hoped this day would come when he said it, but she didn’t think it would be today she got his answer.

“I think she’s broken,” Rose said.

“*I dare you to call Adrien and tell him I love you...*”

“No, she’s not”, Alya said as she waved her hand in front of Marinette, but got no reaction from her.

“I think she’s in shock,” Juleka observed, as she took the phone out of Marinette’s hand.

“Marinette, are you still there?” Adrien asked.

“Hey, Adrien. It’s Juleka. We have a girls’ weekend at Marinette’s.”

“Hey, Juleka. It’s good for you guys to hang out outside of school. Is Marinette okay?” Adrien’s worried voice asked.

“Yes she’s fine, I think she’s just in shock. What did you say to her?” Juleka asked as she snapped her fingers to see if it would snap Marinette out of it. Nothing happened.

“I told her I love her.”

“Yep. That would do it.” Juleka said as she sighed.

“What did he say?” Alya’s curious voice asked.

“Adrien said, ‘I love you.’ to Marinette.”

“It’s about time,” Alya said.

“*Marinette’s heart
skipped a few beats.
She was stunned.*”

Alya had to admit that both Adrien and Marinette were dancing around one another; they all met three years ago when they were fourteen and they were now seventeen.

It took Marienette this long to get comfortable around Adrien and confident enough to become an excellent friend. It was driving their class crazy how each of them danced around one another. This girls’ night out was for them to get those two to admit they were in love with each other. It had happened, so all was right in the world now.

“Well, when Marinette recovers from the shock, please let her know to give me a callback, no matter what time it is. Please text me and let me know how she is doing this weekend since she got some surprising news”, Adrien said.

“I sure will,” Juleka said as they hung up the phone.

The night continued, but it wasn’t until the movie was halfway over that Marinette came out of her shock.

“Wow... ” Marinette softly said as Alya looked at her.

“Welcome back,” Alya said as she gave her a side hug.

“How long was I out for?” Marinette asked.

“For a couple of hours.”

“A couple of hours, it just feels like a few minutes went by for me.”

“Yeah.”

“We are glad you’re back,” Juleka said, as they looked at Marinette with smiles on their faces.

”Thank you guys for being here with me. You guys are the best,” Marinette said, as they came together for a group hug.



“Adrien, my man, how was your weekend?” Nino said as he slung his arm over his shoulder.

“It was great. How was your weekend?” Adrien asked.

“It’s was good man, just didn’t get to spend time with Alya though.”

“I know, didn’t she hang out with Marinette?”

“Yeah, she did. I think it was with some of the other classmates.”

“Yes, I know Juleka was there.”

“How do you know?” Nino asked curiously.

“Marinette called to talk to me, but Juleka had to take over,” Adrien started.

One of Nino’s eyebrows rose.

“Why, the eyebrow raise?”

“Just wondering, why did Juleka take the phone from Marinette?”

“Well, she wanted to tell me something.”

“What did she have to tell you?”

“That she loved me,” Adrien softly said.

“Really?”

“Yes, I told her I love her too.”

“So, are you two together now?”

“Not sure. We haven’t talked since then,” Adrien told him.

“Wow... ”

“Yeah.”

That’s when Nino and Adrien saw both Marinette and Alya. They were a little ways away on their way toward the school. Adrien smiled, and he saw Marinette, who smiled back as she put a strand of her hair behind her ear. They stopped in front of them.

The girls’ weekend went well, and Marinette was in the best mood since Adrien said I love you. They had a spa day the next day, but it wasn’t going to a place of business. They had stayed at Marinette’s and painted their nails.

“Hi,” Marinette said softly.

“Hi, how was your weekend?” Adrien asked them.

“It was fun, sorry I didn’t call you back,” Marinette apologized.

“It’s okay; you got a shock. I know you need time to process. I will give you as much time as you need to handle the news.” Adrien said.

Marinette smiled as they headed to class.



“Now, it’s time for me to take what is mine. I am going to take your Miraculous,” Hawk Moth said as he started to remove Cat’s ring.

Before he could take it, an item hit him in the back of the head and made him stop; he turned to see who had dared to defy him.

This time Hawk Moth decided to go after Ladybug and Cat Noir himself. His plan was going to work. So far, it was okay. He had grabbed the Ladybug blogger and used her to lure Ladybug and Cat Noir out to get their Miraculous. Hawk Moth saw it was Alya.

“Leave him alone,” Alya yelled.

“You, I will take care of you now,” Hawk Moth said as he turned his attention to Alya.

Cat Noir was able to move away from Hawk Moth. Alya’s eyes widened for a moment, but she grabbed something next to herself and threw it. They were on top of one of Paris’ tallest buildings. Hawk Moth had brought Alya here to use her to get Ladybug and Cat Noir here to obtain their Miraculous. The item went flying and hit Hawk Moth, who was not expecting it.

Hawk Moth stumbled backward, and then he fell over the edge. Cat Noir jumped to try and grab Hawk Moth before he went over the edge. A few seconds later, he looked over the side, only to find his father at the bottom. Cat Noir’s eyes widened in shock. Ladybug, with Alya’s help, was able to get to Cat Noir’s side. Ladybug put a hand on his shoulder. Alya stood next to them; she was more concerned about Ladybug and Cat Noir than the identity of Hawk Moth.

“I need to call for an ambulance and figure out a story to tell then how this happened,” Cat Noir said in a shaky voice.

“Cat Noir, I have got this,” Ladybug told him as she hugged him.

“*This time Hawk Moth decided to go after Ladybug and Cat Noir himself.*”

Cat Noir just nodded his head. Ladybug took care of everything while still being at Cat Noir’s side. Alya wanted to be there, but she could tell this wasn’t time to crowd the heroes, so she quietly left. They waited until the ambulance got there and took his father away. Ladybug was shocked, but didn’t let it show when she found out Hawkmoth identity, she went and talked to them to let them know what happened. She was able to get the butterfly and the peacock miraculous before the ambulance arrived there.

“Kitty, are you okay?” Ladybug asked him. There was silence for her answer. Ladybug went over and sat next to him and hugged him; they sat there quietly. It was dark before Cat Noir said anything.

“Thank you, Ladybug. It was great to work with you.”

“I enjoy working with you too.”

“Thank you for saying that.”

“I want you to keep your Miraculous until you are feeling better. Your kwami can help you more than I can now since I cannot be with you as much as I want to at this time,” Ladybug told him.

“Hmm... I... How did you know what I was going to do?”

“The threat is gone, so it’s only natural to give the miraculous back, but I can see you are having a hard time, so you can keep him until you feel ready to give the miraculous back to me.”

“Thank you.”

“You’re welcome,” Ladybug said as Cat Noir rested his head on her shoulder. Ladybug had a smile on her face.



“Adrien, where have you been?” Nathalie’s worried voice asked as she eyed him; since he was out by himself and he was okay, she figured he hadn’t heard the news yet. It was going to break his heart when he heard the news. She cared about both the Agreste men. With Gabriel, it was unrequited love, and with Adrien, it was a parental love. She didn’t know how things were going to go now. She hoped for the best.

“I went out for a walk. Why what happened?”

“Your father was in an accident. Not sure why he was out there, but he had a fall, and he is in the hospital in surgery.” Nathalie’s almost frantic voice said.

“Sorry for not picking up, let’s head to the hospital,” Adrien said as both of them headed to the car that was waiting for them to take them to the hospital.

At the hospital door, Adrien looked to see Marinette, who stood at the hospital entrance. Adrien got out and watched Marinette walk towards him.

“Marinette, what are you doing here?”

“A friend told me what happened. She wanted me to be here by your side because she cares about you, and so do I,” Marinette told Adrien.

“I am glad you’re here.”

A couple of seconds later, a news van stopped in front of the hospital, and the cameramen and the reporter jumped out and headed for them. Suddenly, Lila was by Adrien's side.

"Lila, what the hell?" Adrien practically screamed.

"Adrien, my dear. I just heard about your father, and I am here for you now. I am your girlfriend, after all. How would it look if I wasn't by your side?" A sickly sweet voice said. Marinette stood there with eyes widened a bit.

Lila was up to her old tricks again. Marinette had to think fast because she didn't want to have this situation get out of hand.

"Okay, Lila. I have had enough of this. Since you claim to be my girlfriend, you should know the answers to these questions then," Adrien said.

"I know my Adrienkins," Lila boasted.

The cameras focused on the three of them.

"Okay what my full name?"

"It's Adrien Agreste," Lila said, smiling.

Adrien turned to Marinette.

"Marinette, what's my full name?"

"Adrien John Michael Graham Athanase Agreste," Marinette replied without hesitation.

"Lila, what am I allergic to?"

"You don't have any allergy," Lila said confidently.

"Marinette, what am I allergic to?"

"Feathers."

Lila glared at Marinette.

"Lila, what's my favorite food?"

"Adrien, that's a tricky question, you don't have a favorite food," Lila confidently told him.

“*She wanted me to be here by your side because she cares about you, and so do I...*”

“Marinette, what’s your answer?”

“It’s Beef Pan Fried Noodles.”

Adrien turned to Lila.

“Lila, you claim to be my girlfriend, but you got none of the questions right. How is that being a good girlfriend?” Adrien asked her.

Lila glared at Marinette.

“We just haven’t talked, that’s why I don’t know these things. I am hoping to change that.” Lila said with determination in her voice.

“Maybe this will get it through that thick head of yours that we were never together and never will be,” Adrien said as he turned to Marinette and kissed her. Adrien’s arms wrapped around her waist while her arms wrapped around his neck.

“*... he turned to Marinette
and kissed her...*”

Lila watched Adrien and Marinette. Her face turned red, she stamped her foot, turned, and left the two standing there with cameras on them. They broke apart.

“Wow,” Marinette said.

“I agree. Marinette, will you do the honor of being my girlfriend?” Adrien asked.

“Yes,” Marinette sighed, with a smile on her face.

“I am the happiest man alive.”

“I bet you are. Let go and check on your father.” Marinette said, as as she entwined her hand with his and they walked into the hospital, ignoring the cameras on them and the reporters.



Six months had passed since his father’s accident. He was now in charge of his father’s company. There was a lot he had to look over. If Adrien did not know something, he would get help in understanding how everything worked in his father’s company, now he owned it. He was there to look over the company finances.

“Adrien, are you okay?” Marinette asked as she slid her arms over his shoulders.

“Yes, I am fine. It’s just my father sort of left me with a bit of a mess which I am getting under control,” Adrien’s weak voice said.

“If you need me to do anything, let me know. I am here for you.”

“I know you are. I am glad you are in my life.”

“I am glad I am in your life, as well. It’s great the world isn’t in danger from Hawk Moth anymore,” Adrien said.

“Yes, it is. How is your father, by the way?”

“There is no change, but I am not giving up. Nathalie has the best people in the world helping both my parents, at least they are both alive. I am thankful for that,” Adrien said.

“I am glad they’re both alive. I know it’s not going to be an easy road, but everything will be okay in the end,” Marinette told him.

“I know,” Adrien said, as he pulled her into his lap and hugged her. They sat there for a while. Then Marinette realized that she had to head home.

“Adrien, I got to head home, it getting late,” Marinette told him.

“Just a couple of minutes like this, please?” Adrien asked.

Marinette looked into his emerald eyes.

“Okay, a few more minutes, then I have to get home.”

“Okay.” Marinette would admit that she didn’t want to leave his arms, but she did need to get home. She didn’t have the heart to pull away.

“Adrien, I got to go,” Marinette softly said.

“Okay,” Adrien said as she got up.

“Let me walk you home.”

“You don’t have to do that,” Marinette told him.

“Yes, I do. It would not be gentlemanly if I did not escort you home.”

“Okay. You can escort me,” Marinette said, as they headed out the door with hands entwined.

“Marinette, did you receive an invitation, too?” Adrien asked as he looked at the pastries in the case in front of him. He was at Marinette’s parents’ bakery to visit Marinette. Marinette looked up from behind the counter. She smiled at him as she nodded her head.

“I did not see this coming. Rose and Juleka are the first to get married; they beat Nino and Alya. I was sure those two would be married first before any of us.” Marinette commented.

“I know, but it’s always good to have a few surprises thrown into our lives, especially if they are not going to hurt us in the end,” Adrien said, as he pointed to the items he wanted to get.

Marinette got his items and put them in a bag. They went over to the cash register, and then Marinette rang him up. She gave him his change and watched him put it away.

“I know, right? So are we going to the wedding together?” Marinette asked.

“Yes, we are,” Adrien started.

As he grabbed one of her hands and gently pulled her from behind the counter. He took them to the middle of the shop and stopped. Adrien then knelt on one knee, and a ring box in one hand opened, which had a beautiful simple but elegant twenty-four-carat golden ring in the box.

“Marinette Jia Li Dupain-Cheng, you are my other half to complete me. Without you in my life, my life would be dull and stressful. I fell in love with you when our eyes met when I offered you my umbrella on that rainy day. Would you please do me the honor of being my wife?” Marinette stood there, her hands covering her mouth; some tears started to form in her eyes. Marinette reached out with her left hand towards Adrien.

“Yes, Adrien, I will marry you,” Marinette said as Adrien slipped the ring onto her ring finger. Then he stood up and hugged Marinette as they heard clapping from the patrons in the store. There was a smile on both Adrien and Marinette’s face.

THE END



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